THE HILLSIDE WORK-SCHOLARSHIP CONNECTION
CHARTING A COURSE FOR THE FUTURE

Prepared for:
The Hillside Family of Agencies

Donald E. Pryor, Ph.D.
Project Director

January, 2004

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SUMMARY

The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection (HW-SC) achieves its primary goal of improving school retention and graduation rates for students enrolled in the Rochester City School District who are at risk of dropping out of school prior to graduation. Specifically, *the graduation rate for program students relative to their non-program counterparts is twice what students achieve without the program's intervention.*

% of Students Graduating
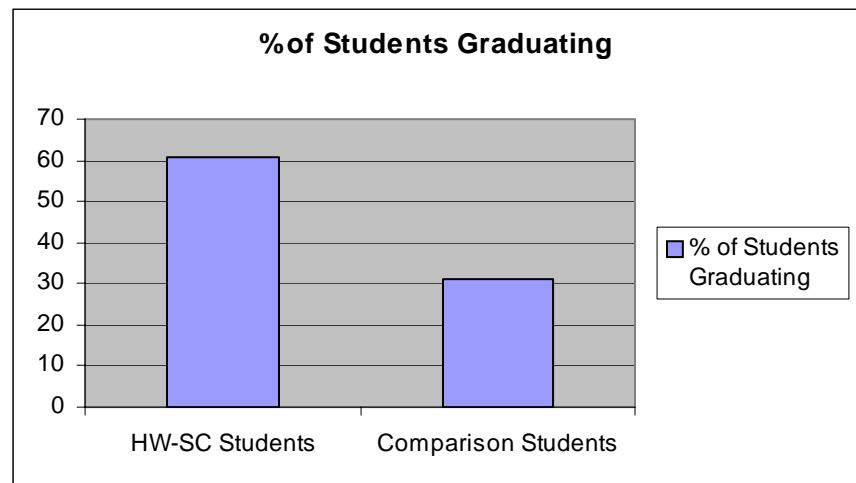
HW-SC makes a dramatic impact on the graduation rates of the students it serves. Among comparable urban students in the City School District who were not exposed to the variety of supports offered by HW-SC, only 31% graduated, versus 61% of those exposed to the program for at least seven months. Nearly all of the HW-SC successful graduates stayed in the program through their senior years. Thus, HW-SC makes a significant difference in helping students to remain in school and to graduate.

About HW-SC and the Evaluation

Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection was designed to improve graduation rates for at-risk city students, to ensure that graduating students possess essential entry-level work skills when they complete high school, and to increase the number of students who would go on to post-secondary education. The program offers numerous supports to middle and high school students, including full-time Youth Advocates who work closely with the students and their parents, job training and placement support, one-on-one mentoring at job sites, and various academic and social enrichments. HW-SC is viewed by its supporters as a preventive investment in the future of the community as represented by lives of young people with potential for success, but with a high risk of academic failure in the absence of various support services. The program has grown rapidly in recent years, particularly with the influx of three years of New York State Teen Works funding, which began in 2001. HW-SC currently serves about 1,200 students each year, with about 85% of the students in Rochester and the remainder in Syracuse. The evaluation focused on the larger Rochester component of the program.

CGR (Center for Governmental Research) conducted detailed longitudinal analyses of a series of outcomes for about 1,250 students who entered HW-SC since the beginning of the 1996-97 academic year, through the middle of the 2002-03 year. We included in our analyses all students who stayed in the program for at least seven months, which assured more than a full semester of exposure to the program. For those students, we tracked retention from year to year, both within the program and within the City School District, calculated graduation rates, and analyzed changes in year-end grade point averages, attendance rates, and suspensions from year to year, from the year before students entered HW-SC for as long as they remained in the District. Data for program participants were contrasted with comparable data for a comparison sample of similar students who were not exposed to the program's services but who were determined by the City School District to be similar to program students on matching variables such as gender, race/ethnicity, grade point average, poverty status, and grade.

Demographic Characteristics of New HW-SC Admissions

The program has consistently served high proportions of female students, African-Americans, and students from low-income families. Those proportions have become even more pronounced in the past few years. More than 60% of all new admissions in recent years have been female students. Between 75% and 80% have been African-Americans, and similar proportions have been poverty-level students. Although program admission criteria require students to have a grade point average between 2.0 and 2.99 in order to be admitted, exceptions are allowed to accommodate various other risk factors and the admission of siblings of students. Over time, as the program has expanded, increasing proportions of students have been accepted outside those ranges, with more than a fifth of all recent students admitted with grade point averages below 2.0. In recent years, more than 60% of all students admitted to the program have entered as 7th- or 8th-graders.

HW-SC Graduation Rates Vary by Cohort, but Always Exceed Comparison Student Rates

While the program emphasizes reaching students early and enrolling them in HW-SC at the earliest grade possible, in reality, retention rates from 7th and 8th grades through to graduation have not been high to date. Rather, students who enter the program for the first time in 9th or 10th grade have a much higher probability of staying in school and graduating than do their comparison sample peers in the same grades who are not exposed to the program, and a much greater likelihood of doing so than do students who enter the program at a younger age.

Graduation Rates for Cohorts Reaching Their Senior Years
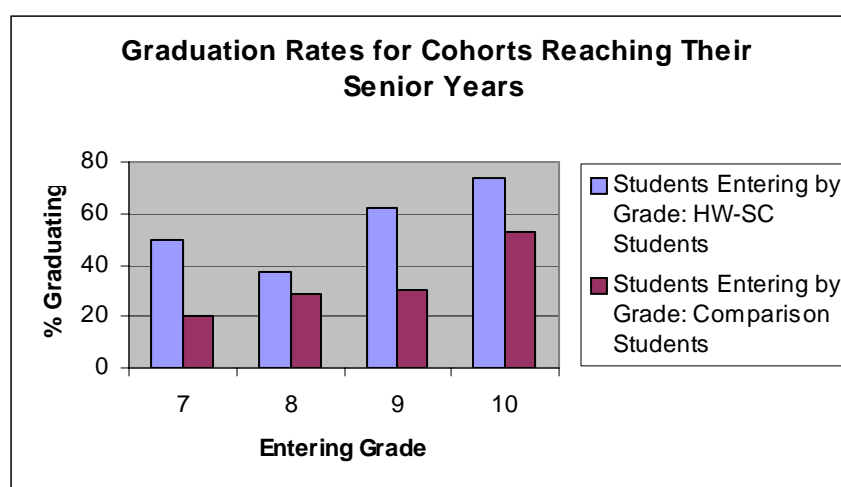
Even though graduation rates have been lower among cohorts of students who enter HW-SC in middle school years, the rates have nonetheless been significantly higher than for comparable students not exposed to the program's support services. The program is in the process of addressing issues related to students' transition from middle to high school, which should help to improve future graduation rates among those who enter HW-SC during middle school years.

As noted, in recent years the program has admitted increasing proportions of low-income, low-achieving students, thereby making it more difficult to be successful. Graduation rates have declined consistently over the past four years although, despite these trends, the program has continued to outperform similar students not in the program by a 2-to-1 margin in graduation rates.

Declining Graduation Rates over Time
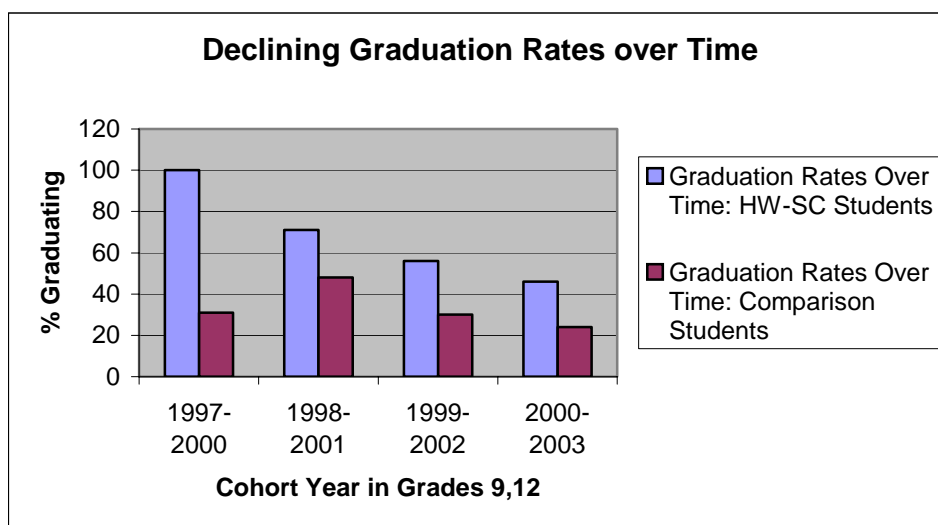
The danger for the program is that graduation rates may have reached a plateau, and may even continue at lower levels unless the program changes its admission criteria and/or strengthens its academic support and job placement components.

Among comparison group students not exposed to HW-SC program supports, a steady erosion of about a third of the previous year's students leave school each year, from the 9th grade through to each cohort's senior year. The erosion has been much smaller among those exposed to HW-SC, but even with the program supports, 24% of the program's students over the past

four years who completed their junior year dropped out before the end of their cohort's senior year.

Thus the program clearly has a significant impact in retaining students much longer in their high school careers than would be the case if they were not in HW-SC, and twice as many ultimately graduate—but the reality remains that even with the program's support services, the combination for many students of low academic performance and the absence of jobs ultimately defeats the best advocacy efforts of the program. As successful as the program has been in providing needed supports and incentives to help students stay in school, and to double the graduation rate of those it has been able to serve, that graduation rate could be even higher in the future if HW-SC can build on its strengths to improve the academic performance and increase the job opportunities of more students in subsequent student cohorts.

Differential Success Rates for Different Groups of Students

The program has its most positive impact on the following subgroups of students: African-Americans, females, and students whose family income levels are above the poverty level. It has a modest positive impact with male students, though at a considerably lower level than for females, and with poverty students, though at a considerably lower level than for non-poverty students.

More specifically, of African-American students who have entered the program in the 9th grade or earlier, 60% have successfully graduated from high school. By contrast, only 27% of similar black students in the comparison sample have graduated. Among blacks who have entered the program in 10th grade, about 80% have graduated, compared with 57% of their peers in the comparison sample. On the other hand, only between 35% and 40% of both Hispanic and white HW-SC students have graduated—rates comparable to the rates of their comparison sample peers not exposed to the program.

Graduation rates for girls entering the program since 1996-97 have been about 13 percentage points higher than for boys. Through 9th-grade entering cohorts, about 61% of all entering girls have graduated, compared with 48% of boys. By contrast, only about 30% of both boys and girls in the comparison sample (not exposed to the program) have graduated. Among entering 10th-

graders, about 81% of girls and 68% of boy participants in HW-SC have graduated.

HW-SC students from families above the poverty level, not surprisingly, are much more likely to graduate from school than are students from families living in poverty—about 72% to about 48%. But even though the poverty-level students in the program are less likely to graduate than their non-poverty counterparts, the program supports do help the poverty students graduate at a higher level than would occur without the program: without HW-SC, about 35% of the poverty-level students in the comparison sample graduated, compared to the 48% level of those in the program.

Although graduation rates are highest among students who enter the program with grade point averages of 2.5 or higher, large proportions of such students would have graduated on their own, without HW-SC intervention. On the other hand, although graduation rates are lowest among students who enter the program with grade point averages below 2.0 (graduation rates of 50%), the graduation rate for those students is more than three times as high for those students as it would be without program supports.

Post-Program Status of Graduates

Of HW-SC students who successfully graduate from high school, between 75% and 80% each year continue on to some form of post-secondary education. Of those, about one-third typically go on to four-year colleges or universities, at least initially.

Factors Impacting on Graduation Rates

The most important component of the program model appears to be the Youth Advocates' personal relationships developed with the students—and typically sustained and nurtured on a long-term basis over several years, in many cases. These consistent sustained relationships provide strong role models and adult supports that are often in short supply in the lives of many of the young people in the program, and they appear to help motivate students to stay in school at twice the rates of their counterparts who have no such support advocates.

Despite the program's success in graduating students at much higher rates than would occur without its intervention, it has not had a similar impact in improving academic achievement or attendance levels. The program has had some modest impact on

helping to improve student attendance to a level slightly higher than what it would have been for students not exposed to the program. But this has not translated into higher academic achievement levels. Particularly as the program has admitted more students with lower grade point averages, academic achievement levels among the program's students have steadily declined, especially between middle school and high school. Again, to address those issues, and to increase the incentive value of jobs to help motivate strong academic performance, the program will need to strengthen the academic supports available to its students, and increase the numbers of students placed in jobs with mentors. In 2003, the proportion of high school students in the program with any type of job has typically averaged about 25% per month. Given the implied promise and program emphasis on jobs, program officials are actively seeking ways to increase these numbers in the future.

On a basic level, the data suggesting the limits of the program's ability to have a dramatic impact on factors apart from graduation and retention rates point to the program's need to partner more effectively with other stakeholders in the community as a means of broadening and strengthening its impact. For example, the number of program participants who are employed while in the program is limited by two factors: some because their grades are not sufficiently high to meet standards to qualify, and some because there are not enough jobs available to meet the demand. The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection needs additional support both to improve student academic performance through targeted and effective interventions such as consistent tutoring and remedial education supports, and to gain access to additional jobs by way of partnerships with the local business community.

HW-SC program staff understand well the academic challenges facing the students they serve; many Advocates spend time providing tutoring and helping with homework. Nevertheless, Advocates alone are not in a position to remediate the numerous academic deficiencies confronting program participants. For example, over the past four years, the "pass" rate on the 8th-grade New York State Math test has hovered at around 11% for students enrolled in Rochester's middle schools. Unfortunately, performance such as this is not simply the product of one hard

year, one bad teacher, or students who don't quite understand the quadratic equation. Rather, improving such achievement levels will take serious, intensive intervention. The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection cannot do it alone. But, especially as more low-achieving students enter the program, it will be essential for the program and the community to find ways to strengthen the core academic supports available to its students, both to increase the overall graduation rates, and to strengthen the cumulative academic records of those who do graduate, and thereby expand the post-secondary options available to them upon graduation. Such an enhancement of services will be needed to help produce a more skilled, academically-prepared set of graduates who will be both qualified for college admission and also competent to handle the challenges of the future work force.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Fundamentally, the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection makes a tremendous impact when it comes to keeping disadvantaged urban youth in school and helping them to graduate. The program does so primarily through the strong relationships built between Youth Advocates and the students they serve. The program, however, could do so much more. With additional resources to strengthen the academic supports and job placements available to those in the program, the research suggests that graduation rates could be even higher, and the academic achievement levels of those graduates would assure their ability to compete even more effectively for post-secondary education opportunities and for workforce opportunities of the future.

The report strongly recommends the continuation and strengthening of the HW-SC model, and of strong financial support so that the program can continue to serve the hundreds of students it currently serves each year. It also recommends that special resources be devoted to developing a strong academic support system for HW-SC students, and that the program enter into a collaborative partnership with the Rochester Business Alliance and/or the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment Board to recruit sufficient new employer partners to provide sufficient jobs and mentors to meet the future needs of the growing numbers of HW-SC students. It also recommends replication of the model on a pilot test basis, and makes other suggestions for ways the program can build on its current

successes to become even more effective in further increasing graduation rates among at-risk urban youth in the future.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Staff Team

Becky Sumner was instrumental to the successful completion of this project. She conducted many of the interviews and focus groups throughout the evaluation, oversaw much of the data analysis portion of the project, and wrote significant sections of the report. Paul Priebe conducted a number of the interviews and focus groups, and helped write sections of the report based on findings from those discussions. Liz Davis spent countless hours making sense out of the complexities of the HW-SC and City School District databases, and managed to create integrated sets of data for each HW-SC and comparison sample student across multiple years. Without Liz's creativity, attention to detail, and analytic skills, many of the analyses presented in the report would not have been possible.

PART ONE: THE CONTEXT

Part One of this report includes the first three chapters, which provide the background information needed to set the context for the remaining analytical chapters of the report. The first three chapters include the Introduction, a Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection Overview, and a summary of the Evaluation Methodology. The chapters in the subsequent parts of the report provide more in-depth understanding of both the methodology and of the program and its components, in the context of presenting the analytical findings, both quantitative and qualitative, of the evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Established in 1987 by Wegmans Food Markets as the Wegmans Work-Scholarship Connection, the program known now as the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection was created in response to the Urban League of Rochester's "Call to Action" to the business community and other sectors of the community to invest actively in the Rochester City School District. The resulting program was designed to improve graduation rates for students attending city schools who are considered at risk of dropping out of school prior to graduation, to ensure that graduating students possess essential entry-level work skills when they complete high school, and to increase the number of students who would go on to post-secondary education. The program offers numerous supports to middle and high school students, including full-time youth advocates who work closely with the students and their parents, job training and placement support, one-on-one mentoring at job sites, and various academic and social enrichments.

In 1996, the Work-Scholarship Connection became a part of the Hillside Family of Agencies (while retaining an ongoing financial and employer partner relationship with Wegmans), and in the ensuing years has grown considerably—serving approximately 1,200 students in both the Rochester and Syracuse school districts during the 2002-03 school year.

In the Fall of 2002, CGR (the Center for Governmental Research Inc.) responded to a Request for Proposals from the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection for an evaluation of its youth development model. CGR proposed an evaluation approach that would provide both qualitative and quantitative analyses of program efficacy and student performance, and that would result in practical recommendations for strengthening the program and its existing data collection and analysis efforts. CGR's proposal was accepted, and this report details the findings and implications resulting from the evaluation.

2. HW-SC PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In the 16 years since its founding, Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection (HW-SC) has undergone numerous changes while remaining focused on the initial objectives identified at program inception. When the program was initiated by Wegmans Food Markets in 1987, the Wegmans Work-Scholarship Connection, as it was then known, employed one Youth Advocate and served 30 students in the Rochester City School District. In the 2002-03 academic year, the program employed 42 Youth Advocates and served approximately 1,200 students in both the Rochester and Syracuse City School Districts. The majority of the expansion in program size occurred as a result of New York State Teen Works funding, monies awarded to HW-SC through Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) funding streams, and administered by the State Department of Labor. The Teen Works funding, announced in late 2000, was for $4.8 million, to be spread over three years, ending in the spring of 2004.

The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection reported a 2002 operating budget of approximately $2.3 million, more than double the 1997-98 budget of about $984,000. In 2002, 72% of HW-SC funding (more than $1.6 million) came from government agencies. Another 11% of the program's budget (about $250,000) was funded through the United Way, and the remaining 17% (about $400,000) was underwritten through "gift and other revenue."

During the 1999-2000 and 2000-01 school years, HW-SC served between 400 and 450 students a year. With the influx of the new funding, the number of students doubled to more than 900 in 2001-02, and expanded substantially again in 2002-03 to about 1,200. During that time, in order to manage the expansion in numbers of students, the program also experienced rapid corresponding growth in staffing. In 2001, Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection employed an Executive Director, a Program Manager, an Information Analyst, 24 Youth Advocates, five Managers (supervising Youth Advocates) and two administrative staff members. One year later, the program expanded to employ the following additional staff: Assistant Director, Employment Development Specialist, Program

Coordinator for Seniors and Graduates, Data Manager, 18 more Youth Advocates, an additional supervising Manager, and an additional administrative support person. Although growing rapidly, HW-SC, during a time when the annual program budget has about doubled, has managed to approximately triple the number of students it serves each year.

HW-SC is viewed by funders and supporters as an example of a youth development collaborative partnership that has effectively blended financial, service-provision and administrative resources across the public (funding and School District partnerships), for-profit (corporate funding and provision of job sites and mentors), and not-for-profit (funding, administrative, and service provision) sectors of the community.

Program Mission, Goals and Premises

Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection was designed to provide a variety of supports and incentives to urban students deemed as capable of achieving academic success, but at risk of dropping out of school due to various demonstrated behavioral indicators and/or challenges in their personal or family circumstances. The focus of the program is not only on increasing the high school graduation rate of its participating students, but also on ensuring that they leave high school with the knowledge and skills needed to pursue post-secondary education and/or productive employment opportunities upon graduation.

Supporters of HW-SC view it as a preventive initiative that represents an investment in the lives of individual young people, and hence an investment in the future of the community. They speak of the program as providing a realistic means, through its various supports, of helping students "imagine a life, and create and heighten expectations" that would otherwise not be realistic or imaginable for many, given the history of their families. The HW-SC investment is viewed as helping to intervene in the lives of the students and their families in cost-effective ways that address issues as they arise, rather than having to address them in more costly ways in a crisis mode later. Not only do supporters view the program as cost effective from the perspective of strengthening youth—helping them become productive citizens and thereby avoid costly interventions and services later in life (e.g., welfare dependence, incarceration, homelessness, etc.)—but they also view

HW-SC as helping employers by providing them with trained students whom they view as less likely to terminate than other part-time urban employees they might hire on their own.

HW-SC Program Components

The most critical design component of the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, received automatically by all program participants, is the school-based Youth Advocates, who are assigned to help all HW-SC students acquire and develop the skills needed to be successful in all aspects of their lives. They are charged to meet regularly to provide support to all students, monitor their academic and work- or training-related performance, help students identify career goals and develop positive work and study habits, and assist in providing whatever supports are needed to help them succeed academically. *The program model is predicated on the assumption that key to the program's ultimate success is the relationship developed and nurtured over several years between the Advocates and their students.*

According to the model, students are also expected to attend weekly enrichment sessions with topic areas focused on academic support, career exploration, developing job-readiness skills and behaviors, college preparation, and social and life skills. Those students who have completed the job-readiness training and who are in good academic standing are also eligible for placement in part-time jobs with local employers, many of which offer worksite mentors who provide additional supports to help students become successful employees. Additional program resources are devoted to helping students assess and prepare for post-secondary academic or employment opportunities. The potential for jobs, and also the possibility of a college education and even a partial scholarship, is viewed by the program as an incentive which helps many of the students in the program remain on track academically, as access to jobs and college only becomes possible once students have built a successful academic foundation. Students in the program are also expected to participate in 20 hours of community service each year.

The program is voluntary, and each student (and a parent or guardian) must agree to and sign a contract outlining the expectations the student, parent and program are agreeing to. According to the program's stated entry requirements, to be

eligible for admission to HW-SC, students must have a grade point average of between 2.0 and 2.99,[1] and demonstrate the need for program support through the existence of one or more "risk indicators"—such as being behind grade level, history of poor school attendance, previous suspensions, poor standardized test scores, etc.—and/or a variety of other individual or family economic or social risk factors. Students typically enter the program in the 7th, 8th or 9th grades, though some enter in later years.

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[1] Beginning in the 1998-99 school year, HW-SC eligibility criteria were modified to enable the program to admit students with a grade point average between 2.0 and 2.99. Prior to that time, eligibility was limited to students with GPAs between 2.5 and 2.99, although exceptions have historically been made if significant extensive risk factors were also in place.

3. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Using existing data and a series of surveys, interviews and focus groups, CGR evaluated the progress of Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection participants against a number of outcome measures, assessed the services provided to them through the program, and reviewed and analyzed existing internal program processes and procedures. By agreement with Hillside and HW-SC officials, all analyses focused on the Rochester components of the program. This decision was made for a number of reasons, mostly related to program officials' concerns about potential problems with being able to access needed extensive data from the Syracuse City School District within the project's available resources. And, since the overwhelming majority of students in the program over the years have been in Rochester (an estimated 85% - 90% or more over the past 10 years), it was felt that all aspects of the evaluation should concentrate on the Rochester portion of the program, with the belief that results from those analyses could reasonably be considered transferable to Syracuse. More specifically, the evaluation included the following research components:

❖ Detailed longitudinal analyses of a series of outcomes were conducted for students who entered HW-SC since the beginning of the 1996-97 academic year, through the middle of the 2002-03 year. We began with 1996-97 since that was the first academic year in which the program was fully operated under Hillside's oversight, so we decided to focus attention only on students served exclusively by the *Hillside* W-SC. Furthermore, we included in our analyses only students who stayed in the program for at least seven months, which assured more than a full semester of exposure to the program.

❖ For those 1,251 students, we tracked retention from year to year, both within the program and within the City School District, calculated graduation rates, and tracked changes in year-end grade point averages, attendance rates, and suspensions from year to year, from the year before students entered HW-SC for as long as they remained in the District. We compared performance on these measures for different cohorts of program participants who entered the program since the beginning of 1996-97, and analyzed

differences across such demographic characteristics as students' grade at program entry, gender, race/ethnicity, poverty status, and academic level (grade point average) prior to program entry.[2]

❖ In addition, CGR worked with the CSD's Research, Evaluation and Testing and Management Information Systems departments to identify an appropriate comparison group against which to contrast HW-SC performance on the same measures noted above. The comparison sample was determined by matching HW-SC students with similar non-program students on the basis of their grade point average, gender, race/ethnicity, poverty status, and grade. We hypothesized that students in HW-SC would "perform better" on the various outcome measures over time than would those in the comparison sample.

❖ To add further contextual richness to the quantitative analyses, CGR conducted interviews and focus groups with representatives from several key groups of stakeholders: (1) all Rochester-based HW-SC administrative and program staff; (2) HW-SC student participants in both middle and high schools; (3) parents of program participants; (4) Rochester City School District staff who provide support and connections between HW-SC and the District; and (5) representatives of employer partners who work closely with HW-SC and provide mentors to student employees.

❖ CGR administered a survey to a sample of HW-SC student participants near the end of the 2002-03 school year, in order to obtain their perspectives on various elements of the program. Survey findings were supplemented by more in-depth discussions with three focus groups of middle and high school HW-SC participants, as noted above.

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[2] Our analyses were subject to the limitations of both City School District and HW-SC data, both of which have undergone a number of transitions over the years in how various measures have been defined and collected. Moreover, as Hillside has become responsible for the program, and as new funders have required additional types of information about program participants, new data have been added from year to year, and the consistency with which even historically-maintained data have been collected has changed somewhat over time, with the growth in numbers of participants and staff responsible for collecting and entering the data. Nonetheless, after considerable effort on the part of HW-SC, CSD and CGR staff to make the data as complete and consistent as possible, CGR is very confident of the reliability of the data included in this report.

PART TWO: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

This second part of the report presents the most important findings about the program and its impact on the students it serves. The first chapter in Part Two analyzes the trends in program admissions over the past several years and in characteristics of the students who have been enrolled in the Work-Scholarship Connection since Hillside became responsible for the program's operation. Subsequent chapters in Part Two present several series of longitudinal data that show how program participants have fared, compared to a similar comparison sample, on such outcome measures as graduation and retention rates; post-graduation destinations; academic performance as measured by year-end grade point averages; attendance; suspensions from school; and part-time employment rates. The final chapter in Part Two summarizes findings from a survey of HW-SC students conducted near the end of the 2002-03 academic year.

The comparison sample against which the performance of HW-SC students is compared in Chapters 5 and 7 through 9 was selected to be as identical as possible to the program participant profile on the following key defining program participant characteristics: gender, race/ethnicity, grade point average, poverty status, academic year and grade. Although any comparison sample cannot perfectly control for such intangible factors as motivation, the ability to develop 1-to-1 matches for all program participants on so many key defining characteristics provides program officials, policymakers and funders with a high degree of confidence that any differences in performance between program participants and students in the comparison sample can reasonably be attributed to the effects and impact of the program intervention, and not to differences between the two groups.[3]

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[3] An alternative comparison sample strategy would have been to track the performance of students on Youth Advocate "waiting lists," if they had never entered HW-SC. But, since many of those students were eventually admitted, that was not possible. However, CGR, HW-SC and School District officials all agreed that the rigorous matching process created an appropriate comparison sample against which to benchmark program performance. The approach used is much more rigorous than comparison group approaches often used in such research.

4. TRENDS IN PROGRAM ADMISSIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

As indicated in Part One of the report, the Work-Scholarship Connection has grown dramatically since Hillside assumed responsibility for program operations in a 1996 agreement with program founder Wegmans Food Markets, and particularly since the influx of New York State Teen Works funds beginning in 2001. This chapter documents the increases in program admissions by year and by entering grade, and also provides a profile of the characteristics of the program participants, and how those characteristics have changed over time.

First, a few words of explanation of what follows: The data presented in this chapter include only *new admissions* to the program each specified year. They do not include any "holdover" students who had previously been admitted in an earlier year. Furthermore, we only included students admitted in grades 7, 8, 9 and 10. The program over the years has admitted a few students as late as their junior or even senior years, but those were typically under unusual circumstances not routinely associated with the program, and since both the amount and nature of HW-SC exposure were therefore different for those students, we chose not to include them in our analyses.[4]

Finally, within each academic year, students admitted to the program April 1 or later were considered to have entered the program during the following academic year. This decision was made in consultation with HW-SC program officials, since we jointly agreed that a student only in the program for less than three months of a program year should not be counted against that year's program outcome statistics, since there may have been insufficient exposure to "hook" the student. If he or she continued in the program into the fall of the following year, the student was counted as entering the program during that year.

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[4] We also excluded a small number of students admitted in the 6th grade, both because none of them would have had sufficient time to reach their senior years during the period of time covered by the evaluation, and because their numbers were too small to contribute anything of substance to the analyses.

This decision means that our data are not directly comparable to cohort data presented by HW-SC, but we and the program believe that the data presented in the subsequent chapters reflect a more accurate accounting of the program's impact, based on sufficient HW-SC exposure to legitimately hold it accountable for subsequent student performance. Moreover, it should be noted that relatively few students were directly affected by this decision anyway, since most new admissions to the program do not occur between April and June within any given year.

Admissions by Year and Grade

As indicated in Table 1 below, the numbers of new admissions have increased dramatically at two different periods since Hillside assumed responsibility for program operations: during the 1998-99 school year, and in the 2001-02 and 2002-03 years.

Table 1: New HW-SC Admissions, by Grade and Year

Entering Grade	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
7	2	5	38	42	69	120	67	**343**
8	2	11	43	29	34	108	131	**358**
9	17	27	78	54	41	61	62	**340**
10	18	11	2	35	15	20	109	**210**
Total	39	54	161	160	159	309	369	1251

Note: each year refers to the end of an academic year. That is, 1997 refers to the 1996-97 academic year, the year HW-SC became a Hillside affiliate. Admissions for 2002-03 include admissions only through January.

Several points are worth noting about the trends over the past seven years:

❖ The number of admissions virtually tripled between the 1997-98 year and 1998-99. During the latter year, the program modified its admission criteria to enable a student with a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0-2.49 to be eligible for program admission. Previously, only students with GPAs between 2.5 and 2.99 were considered eligible, with some exceptions. This change not only opened HW-SC doors to numerous students with GPAs in the

2.0-2.49 range, but this also marked the beginning of increasing numbers of students admitted as "exceptions" with GPAs below 2.0 (see further discussion below).

❖ After the significant increase in number of new admissions in 1998-99, admissions remained virtually unchanged for three years until the next explosion, in 2001-02, with a further increase the following year, both directly attributable to the influx of the Teen Works funds and resulting expanded program capacity. If anything, the 2002-03 numbers are conservative, since they only include the first half of the year.

❖ Through 1998, the program was primarily serving high school students. Beginning with the watershed 1998-99 year, and in increasing proportions since 2000-01, the program has increasingly been admitting students in 7th and 8th grades. In the two and a half years beginning with 2000-01, 63% of all new admissions involved 7th-and 8th-graders, and that percentage would probably be higher if all of 2002-03 were included.

❖ The program typically enrolls few students beyond the 9th grade. With the notable exception of this past year, only about 11% of all new admissions since 1996-97 have involved 10th-graders. It is not clear from our data why the numbers of 10th-graders dramatically increased in 2002-03, although it seems likely that at least some of those may have entered the program as 9th-graders at the end of the previous year, but were counted as 10th-graders entering the following academic year, as described above.

Demographic Characteristics of New Admissions

The program has consistently served high proportions of female students, African-Americans, and students from low-income families. Those proportions have become even more pronounced in the past few years. Although the majority of students have been admitted within the specified GPA ranges, increasing proportions have been accepted outside those ranges as the program has expanded.

Gender

Beginning with the 1996-97 year, 61% of all HW-SC admissions have been girls. Those proportions have increased somewhat in recent years, from about 59% through 2000 to about 62% since then. As will be shown in more detail in the Part Three discussions, program staff consistently indicated that it is harder both to recruit and to retain boys in the program, and these data confirm at least the first

As program eligibility criteria and funding resources expanded, annual HW-SC admissions have grown rapidly.

Almost 2/3 of all recent admissions have involved middle school students.

part of that statement (see the next chapter for more on the retention and graduation issue).

Race/Ethnicity

From the beginning, the vast majority of the program participants have been African-American students. This is generally consistent with the pattern of City School District demographics. Since the program became affiliated with Hillside, 72.5% of the new admissions have involved black students (about 46% black females and about 27% black males). The proportions have accelerated since 2000: about two-thirds of all admissions through 1999-2000 involved African-Americans, compared to almost three-fourths of all admissions since then.

> **African-American students are predominant in the program, and Hispanics are a declining proportion.**

The second-largest concentration of students in the program has historically been Hispanic/Latino boys and girls. Since 1996-97, about 13% of all students have been Hispanics. That proportion actually has declined slightly since 2000, with about 14% of all admissions through that year, and just over 12% since then. On the other hand, because the total number of students has increased, this slightly smaller proportion actually represents somewhat *larger actual numbers* of Hispanic/Latino students admitted to the program in recent years.

Caucasian students have typically represented a small minority within HW-SC. Since the Hillside affiliation began, only about 6.75% of all program admissions have involved white students, and that proportion has been steadily declining in recent years, from about 10% through 2000 to less than 4% since then.

Students of "other" racial/ethnic groups (primarily "mixed minority," Asian-Americans or Native-Americans) have also declined in recent years. Representing about 7.5% of all students admitted since 1996-97, that proportion has declined from about 10% through 2000 to 6% or less since then.

Poverty Level

Using free or reduced-price lunch designation as a proxy for students living below the poverty level, *fully three-fourths of all students admitted to HW-SC since 1996-97 would be considered as living in poverty.* Again, this is consistent with overall CSD patterns. Perhaps not surprisingly, with the advent of Teen Works/TANF funding, that proportion has increased from about 70% of those admitted through 1999-2000 to about 80% of the admissions in 2002-03.

Grade Point Average

CGR worked with the City School District and HW-SC to determine year-end GPA data for the year preceding student admissions into the program, but in about 15% of the cases, especially admissions from earlier years, the data were not available. Of the 85% of the admissions where pre-program grade point averages were available, they fell within the 2.0-2.99 eligibility range in just under 60% of all cases—about one-third of all students were within the original 2.5-2.99 range that existed for the relatively small number of program admissions through 1997-98, and just over one-quarter of all admissions had GPAs in the 2.0-2.49 range that was added as of the 1998-99 school year. But *just over 40% of all admissions with known pre-program GPAs fell outside even the expanded GPA eligibility criteria—about one-fifth below 2.0, and just over a fifth with GPAs of 3.0 or higher.*

> **40% of admissions have had grades outside HW-SC eligibility ranges, with growing proportions under 2.0.**

The program has become much more likely to admit students with GPAs below the 2.0 threshold in recent years, especially among entering high school students. *Only about 5% of all admissions prior to 1998-99 involved students with sub-2.0 averages, compared to between one-fifth and a fourth of those admitted in the past three to four years* (among 7th- and 8th-graders, the proportions were in the 16% to 19% range). Conversely, in the past two to three years, the program has become less likely to admit students with GPAs of 3.0 or higher: about 18% of all admissions in recent years, compared to about a third in previous years. Those admitted with GPAs in the 2.0-2.49 range have increased from about 20% of all admissions through 2000 to about 27% since then. The proportions of those in the 2.5-2.99 range have remained fairly constant, at about one-third of all admissions, since 1996-97.

Siblings

Traditionally HW-SC has maintained a policy of routinely admitting siblings of students already admitted to the program. Typically those siblings are admitted regardless of other program criteria, on the assumption that whatever family dynamics are affecting the initial student admitted to the program would also impact on any siblings. Thus siblings within appropriate grades for the program, beginning in middle school, are deemed eligible for HW-SC if they are interested. Of the 1,251 admissions to the program included in our data base (from the beginning of the 1996-97 school year through the middle of the 2002-03 year), 217 were siblings (17% of the total). Compared to their 17%

17% of all admissions have involved siblings, many with GPAs of 3.0 or higher.

representation among all admissions who stayed in the program at least seven months, siblings were slightly over-represented among students admitted with a 3.0 or higher grade point average (20.5% of those were siblings); conversely, 15% of all students admitted with GPAs below 2.0 were siblings.

Conclusions

In recent years, the program has been admitting more low-income, low-GPA students.

As the program has expanded rapidly in recent years, it has admitted increasingly higher proportions of low-income students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, suggesting higher proportions of program participants living in or near the poverty level. Similarly, the program has admitted higher proportions of students with low pre-program GPAs, and considerably fewer students with upper-level GPAs in excess of 3.0. It will be important to keep these GPA and poverty trends in mind when the discussion shifts to outcome measures in subsequent chapters.

5. GRADUATION AND RETENTION STATUS

In this and subsequent chapters, we track the performance of HW-SC and comparison sample students by cohorts. That is, we track what happens to each year's new program entrants (and their comparison sample matches) by entering cohort (each year's entering 7th-, 8th-, 9th- and 10th-graders). In this chapter, we present data on the proportion of each cohort's students who are retained as active students within the School District from year to year, through the senior year for each entering cohort. We compared retention rates from year to year for both program and comparison group students, as well as determining the respective graduation rates for both groups, by cohort.

Definitions and Caveats

As noted in Chapters 3 and 4, our analyses are based strictly on those students who were first admitted to HW-SC between the beginning of the 1996-97 academic year and the middle of the 2002-03 year. Students who had entered HW-SC prior to the program's affiliation in 1996 with Hillside were not included in the analyses. We also included in our analyses only those students who entered the program in grades 7 through 10, thereby excluding a few students who, over the years, have been admitted to the program in other grades, and we included only students who had been enrolled in HW-SC for at least seven months, to ensure a fair test of program impact. All HW-SC students meeting those criteria were then tracked on various outcome measures for as long as they remained in the School District, whether or not they remained active in the HW-SC program after the seven-month minimum period.

We excluded from our analyses students who moved out of the City School District prior to graduation, or died, since we believe that such terminations should not be held against the HW-SC program. For example, while the program is designed to prevent dropouts and should be held accountable for any students who officially drop out of school, the program should not be "blamed" if a student's family chooses to move out of the District. Those whose CSD "termination code" reflected such reasons as moving from the District were deleted from the analyses of both the program and comparison samples (about 10% of the students in

the original samples were deleted for this reason). On the other hand, all other students in both samples who terminated from the District, for reasons which the program could in theory have prevented (e.g., dropouts), were included in the analysis samples. Thus the evaluation was based on those students on whom the program had a realistic opportunity to have an impact.

For purposes of the evaluation, we modified the way in which HW-SC counts "graduations" in two ways: (1) We did not count students who received GED diplomas, even though the program does count them as graduates, because such information was not available for comparison group students. Not including such degrees in HW-SC graduate counts had the effect of reducing annual graduate totals by an average of no more than one or two persons a year in our analyses. (2) On the other hand, we did include in the graduation totals students who graduated at some point after their cohort's senior year. This decision had the effect of adding an average of about two graduates per year to HW-SC reported annual graduation totals, and an average of three or four per year to the comparison sample totals.

The net effect of these definitions and caveats is, on balance, relatively neutral in terms of favoring the program or not. Some of the decisions had the practical effect of slightly favoring the program in our analyses, while others had the opposite effect. Our analyses indicate that the decisions, taken together, tend to cancel each other out, and thus had no significant impact either way on the ultimate findings and conclusions, in large part because the decisions and caveats were applied consistently in all analyses across both the program and comparison groups.

HW-SC Increases Retention and Graduation Rates

As shown in Table 2 on the next page, considering all HW-SC cohorts whose students (as defined above) have entered the program since 1996-97 and which had reached their cohort's senior year by 2002-03, *61% of HW-SC students had graduated through 2002-03 (plus it is likely that a few others may graduate in subsequent years). By comparison, only 31% of similar students not exposed to HW-SC had graduated.*[5]

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[5] More detailed data, presented by individual year, of all measures presented in the report, are available upon request from CGR.

Table 2: Graduation Rates for Cohorts Which Have Reached Their Senior Years, by Entering Grade Cohort

| Entering Grade | N | % of Students Who Graduated | |
		HW-SC Students	Comparison Sample
7	6	50	20
8	49	37	29
9	157	62	30
10	74	74	53
Total	**286**	**61**	**31**

Note: These data represent only students who entered HW-SC in the specified grades (and their matched comparison students) and whose entering cohorts had reached their senior years by 2002-03. N = the number of those students entering the program in each cohort (and their matched students). The %'s represent the proportion of each N who graduated. Others may still graduate in the future.

While this proportion of graduates may seem low by comparison with the program's 80% graduation rate goal, and compared with HW-SC's reported annual rates in most years in excess of 80%, the reality is that the latter figures have been that high because they have been based on the proportion of *retained students (i.e., those who have reached their senior year and remained in the program) who go on to graduate.* The 61% rate, by contrast, represents a truer reflection of the actual graduation rate, as it is based on the *proportion of all students who start with the program in a specific cohort, and stay with HW-SC for at least seven months, rather than only of the proportion of those students who stay in the program and make it to their senior year.*[6] That is, the denominator on which the *true graduation rate* as used here is based, represents a more realistic basis for assessing HW-SC impact. As such, the HW-SC graduation goal should also be changed in the future to reflect this more accurate assessment of

More realistic calculations of graduation rates are presented, and proposed for future program use.

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[6] It should be noted that HW-SC has historically reported graduation rates of entering 9th-grade cohorts, as well as of retained students. As with CGR's reported rates, HW-SC reported graduation rates based on all students in entering cohorts are consistently lower than the percentage of retained students. But HW-SC's primary reported graduation rates, and the stated program graduation goals, have focused on proportions of retained students who graduated.

true program impact, *based on what proportion of all original entering students graduate*.[7]

The reality is that this more realistic success/graduation rate represents a rate that is about double what it would be without the program. That is, *of the comparison sample of similar students not served by HW-SC, only half as many graduated—31% of those in the comparison sample, compared to 61% of those in the program.*[8]

In addition to the program's high graduation rates, compared with the rates of the similar comparison sample, higher proportions of HW-SC students whose cohorts have not yet reached their senior years were also still in school as of the end of the 2002-03 school year, compared with the comparison sample, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Retention Rates for Cohorts Not Yet Reaching Their Senior Years, by Entering Grade Cohort

		% of Students Still in School	
Entering Grade	**N**	**HW-SC Students**	**Comparison Sample**
7	247	94	94
8	157	95.5	92
9	94	95	50
10	20	100	57
Total	**518**	**95**	**85**

Note: These data represent only students who entered HW-SC in the specified grades (and their matched comparison students) and whose entering cohorts had not yet reached their senior years by the 2002-03 school year. N = the number of those students entering the program in each cohort (and their matched comparison students). The %'s represent the proportion of each N who were still in school at the end of the 2002-03 school year. Not included are 368 students who entered HW-SC in 2002-03 (and their matches).

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[7] Of those who stay in the program for seven or more months and who do not move out of the District or die.

[8] It is also worth noting, by way of comparison, that only 23% of those who entered HW-SC and made it through the probationary period, but then left the program after less than seven months, wound up graduating from the District.

Implications

Thus it is reasonable to conclude that *the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection makes a significant difference in helping students to remain in school and to graduate.* Of similar urban students in the City School District who are not exposed to the variety of supports offered by HW-SC, more than two-thirds do not graduate from high school. By way of contrast, of students who spend at least seven months in HW-SC, just over 60% graduate.[9] *Nearly all of those who are successful graduates from the District are those who have stayed in HW-SC through their senior years. Those who terminate from the program at some point rarely graduate.*

In short, relatively few of the city students with characteristics similar to those of HW-SC students are successful in staying in school and graduating, in the absence of the types of supports and advocacy experienced by those in the program. *Although HW-SC by no means guarantees success—almost 40% of its participants do not graduate (typically students who have both left HW-SC and left school)— those exposed to the program for at least seven months are twice as likely to graduate as are similar students without the program support structure.*

Success Rates Increase by Grade of Program Entry

As indicated in the two previous tables, both *school retention and graduation rates increase by grade of entry into the program, especially in contrast with comparison group students not exposed to HW-SC.* In fact, the large differences in retention rates for students in 9th- and 10th-grade cohorts which had not yet reached their senior years by 2002-03 (see Table 3) suggest that the program's significant impact on graduation rates is likely to continue with cohorts still in the program. On the other hand, even though the program emphasizes reaching students early and getting them enrolled in HW-SC at the earliest grade possible—and more than 60% of all students admitted in the past three years have entered as 7th- or 8th-graders—the reality is that *retention rates from 7th and 8th grades through to graduation have not been high to date (though still considerably higher than they would have been without the program).* To date, the reality is that students who enter the program for the first time in 9th or 10th grade have a much higher probability of staying in school and graduating than do their peers in the same grades who

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[9] Not counting GEDs. If they had been included, this percentage would increase slightly—probably by 1% to 2%. These also do not count any who will ultimately graduate after 2002-03.

are not exposed to the program—and a much higher probability compared to students who enter the program at a younger age.

To be fair, it should be noted that the numbers of 7th- and 8th-graders in our evaluation sample who had been in the program long enough to have the possibility of graduating were relatively small, so definitive conclusions should not be reached based on these findings to date, until more 7th- and 8th-grade cohorts have reached their senior years. And the fact that high proportions of such younger students in more recent years (who have not yet reached their senior years) are still in school two to three years after entering the program (shown in Table 3) may suggest that higher graduation rates will be in evidence in future 7th- and 8th-grade cohorts.

Nonetheless, the reality is that HW-SC has experienced some difficulties in retaining younger students in the program, particularly during the transition between middle and high schools. Of 156 students who entered HW-SC as 7th-graders between 1996-97 and 2000-01, 10% were no longer in the program by the end of the 8th grade, and another 9% had left the program by the end of the 9th grade, for an overall 19% attrition rate. Of 228 students who entered HW-SC for the first time as 8th-graders, 12% had terminated from the program before the end of the 9th grade. (See further discussion in Chapter 14 of what the program might be able to do to retain more students during the difficult period of transition from middle to high school.)

> **The program has been most successful with those entering in 9th and 10th grades, and needs to strengthen retention during the middle-to-high-school transition.**

Reduced Success Rates in Recent Years

Table 4 on the next page presents graduation rates in a different way from earlier Table 2. The overall positive findings of program success relative to lower success rates of comparison group students continue to be reflected in this different way of grouping the data, but the table also reflects a troubling decline in graduation rates in each of the last four graduating classes of program participants. The data are presented by cohort years indicating both the 9th-grade entry year and the senior year for that cohort.

The proportions in Table 4 are based exclusively on 9th-grade cohorts. The data are presented this way, because this is most consistent with the way in which HW-SC typically presents its annual data, based on cohorts of all students in the 9th grade each

year, regardless of whether they entered for the first time that year, or continued in the program from middle school. This means that the entering 10th-grade cohorts included in Tables 2 and 3, with their higher success rates, are not included here.[10]

Table 4: Graduation and Retention Rates for Cohorts Reaching Their Senior Years, by 9th-Grade Entering Cohorts

	HW-SC Students		Comparison Sample	
Cohort/Senior Year	**N**	**% Graduated**	**N**	**% Graduated**
1997-2000	15	100	13	31
1998-2001	24	71	23	48
1999-2002	77	56	69	30
2000-2003	95	46	79	24

Note: These data represent only students who entered HW-SC for the first time since 1996-97 and who were in the specified freshman cohorts (and their matched comparison sample students), and whose entering cohorts had reached their senior years. N = the number of those students in each cohort (and their matched comparison group students). The %'s represent the proportion of each N who graduated. In addition to students who graduated "on time" with their senior classes, some students graduated after their senior year. Others may still graduate at some point in the future.

Though program graduation rates are consistently higher for HW-SC students, rates have declined in recent graduating classes.

In each of the four most recent graduating cohorts reflected in the table, the HW-SC students have had significantly higher graduation rates than was true for students in the comparison sample. However, graduation rates have steadily declined in each graduating class since the class of 2000. As the size of HW-SC has grown in recent years—with accompanying relaxing of admission/eligibility criteria, and increasing numbers of students to support and Youth Advocates to supervise and provide consistent services—the success rates have been declining in an inverse relationship. Success rates for program participants remain much higher than among students not exposed to the

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[10] Students remaining in school by 9th grade, from the 7th- and 8th- grade entering cohorts from Table 2, are merged into the 9th-grade cohorts for purposes of this table, thereby slightly pulling down the success rates for 9th-grade-only cohorts in Table 2. Although the net effect of this grouping of students is to reduce the overall success rates slightly from Table 2 groupings, the basic relationship of HW-SC success rates being about twice as high as those for the comparison sample continues to be reflected.

program, but there is a danger that recent declines in graduation rates may continue, especially given the higher proportion in recent years of admissions whose entering GPAs fall below the minimum eligibility requirements for program admission. *To reverse these recent trends and return at least to the 60% successful graduation rate across all program cohorts in the future, more attention will need to be given to returning to more consistent service delivery and to strengthening the academic and job-related supports so critical to the program's success* (as discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters of the report).

Increased Attrition by Grade

Across the past four graduating classes, retention of students within the City School District has declined more rapidly as their senior year approaches. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the closer a student gets to graduation, the more likely s/he may be to stay in school. However, in fact, as the data in the table below show, the reality appears to be just the opposite, with escalating dropout rates in the junior and senior grades.

Table 5: Student Attrition Rates by Grade for the Past Four Graduating Classes

	HW-SC Students		Comparison Sample	
Grade	N in School	% Decline	N in School	% Decline
9	211		184	
10	200	-5	118	-36
11	170	-15	82	-31
12	120	-24	53	-35

As students get older and are legally able to officially drop out of school, as many continue to do poorly academically (as described in Chapter 7), and as many slip further away from meeting Regents test and other requirements for graduation, increasing proportions decide to drop out of the District. *Among comparison group students not exposed to HW-SC program supports, a steady erosion of about a third of the previous year's students have left each year, from the 9th grade through to each cohort's senior year. The erosion has been much smaller among those*

exposed to HW-SC—but even with the program supports, 24% of the program's students over the past four years who completed their junior year dropped out before the end of their cohort's senior year.

> **Youth Advocacy supports are critical to retaining students in school, but enhanced grades and job opportunities are key to further increases in graduation rates.**

Thus the program clearly has a significant impact in retaining students much longer in their high school careers than would be the case if they were not in HW-SC, and twice as many ultimately graduate—but the reality remains that even with the program's support services, the combination for many students of low academic performance and the absence of jobs ultimately defeats the best advocacy efforts of the program. *As successful as the program has been in providing needed supports and incentives to help students stay in school, and to double the graduation rate of those it has been able to serve, that graduation rate in all probability could be even higher in the future if HW-SC can build on its strengths to improve the academic performance and increase the job opportunities of more students in subsequent student cohorts.*

Differential Success Rates by Different Groups of Students

Since Hillside assumed oversight of the Work-Scholarship Connection, the program has not been equally successful in retaining and graduating students of all demographic types. *Although program students of almost all characteristics have done better than their similar comparison group peers not exposed to the program, the degrees of success have varied considerably across different types of students.* In addition to being more successful, at least up to this point, with students who first entered the program in high school rather than middle school, HW-SC has also demonstrated that some other types of students have been more likely to stay in school and graduate than others, as indicated below.

Gender Differences

At all grade levels, but especially among students who entered the program for the first time in high school, *the program has been especially successful in helping female students stay in school and graduate.* Graduation rates for girls entering the program since 1996-97 have been about 13 percentage points higher than for boys. Through 9th-grade entering cohorts, about 61% of all entering girls have graduated, compared with 48% of boys. Among entering 10th-graders, about 81% of girls and 68% of boy participants have graduated.

Even though boys have not done as well as girls, the program has nonetheless provided a boost for boys as well, compared to what would have happened to them without the program. For entering cohorts through the 9th grade, only about 30% of both boys and girls in the comparison sample (not exposed to the program) have graduated, compared to 61% of the girls and 48% of the boys exposed to HW-SC. Similar improvements were found for both boys and girls in comparisons for 10th-grade cohorts as well. Thus, *even though the program has consistently enrolled more females than males, and has been more successful in retaining them in school and graduating them, it has also improved graduation rates for boys as well, compared to their rates without the program,* albeit at smaller rates of improvement than for girls.

Implications: The program makes a positive difference for both male and female students, but needs to find ways to be more effective in motivating boys to stay in school, especially those who enter the program in 9th grade or earlier.

Race/Ethnic Differences

HW-SC has a greater impact on its African-American students than on any other racial/ethnic groups in the program. The program enrolls far more black students than any others, and its impact on them is substantial, compared with similar students not exposed to the program. *Of African-American students who have entered the program in the 9th grade or earlier, 60% have successfully graduated from high school. By contrast, only 27% of similar City School District black students in the comparison sample have graduated.* Among blacks who have entered the program in 10th grade, about 80% have graduated, compared with 57% of their peers in the comparison sample.

The relatively small number of "Other" students in the program (mostly "mixed minority," Asian-Americans or Native-Americans) have also been relatively successful in graduating from high school. Their combined graduation rates have actually been slightly higher than those of the African-American students (67% of those entering by 9th grade, and just over 80% of 10th-graders), but their impact has not been quite as great as among black students compared with their peers, as higher proportions of "other" students in the comparison sample graduated without the program supports than was true for black comparison students.

On the other hand, Caucasian and Hispanic students in the program have not fared nearly as well. At all grade levels, only between 35% and 40% of both Hispanic and white HW-SC students have graduated—rates comparable to the rates of their comparison sample peers not in the program. *Thus, overall, the supports provided by the program appear to have had little or no marginal impact on white and Hispanic students*, compared to the rates at which they would have graduated without the program's intervention.

Implications: The supports provided by the HW-SC have a significant impact on increasing the graduation rate of black students by more than 30 percentage points, compared to similar students not exposed to the program. However, the program has been significantly less successful in motivating Hispanic and white students to remain in school and graduate, and needs to consider how it can have more impact on those subsets of the program participants.

Poverty/Non-Poverty Differences

Using approval for the receipt of a free or reduced-price lunch as a proxy for poverty status, the determination of whether a student pays for lunch or has it paid for (at least in part) is related to how well the program does in helping a student stay in school and graduate. *Those HW-SC students who pay for their own lunch (the "non-poverty" students), not surprisingly, are much more likely to graduate from school than are the free/reduced-price lunch (poverty) students—about 72% to about 48%.* But even though the poverty-level students in the program are less likely to graduate than their non-poverty counterparts, *the program supports do help the poverty students graduate at a higher level than would occur without the program*: Without HW-SC, about 35% of the poverty-level students in the comparison sample graduated, compared to the 48% level of those in the program.

Implications: Although the program helps improve the graduation prospects for some poverty-level students, fewer than half of those students who have entered the program in the 9th grade or earlier have graduated. In the future, the program needs to find ways to keep more of these students in school, presumably in part through more extensive linkages of more of these students with part-time jobs while in the program.

Differences by Pre-Program GPA Levels

Not surprisingly, the higher the grade-point average of students entering the program, the higher the subsequent graduation rates. Among those entering the program in the 9th grade or earlier with a pre-program GPA of 3.0 or higher, almost two-thirds subsequently graduated, leaving about one-third who did not. On the other hand, 92% of 10th-graders who entered with such a high GPA graduated. Of the 9th-grade-or-earlier cohorts, 60% of those with pre-program GPAs between 2.5 and 2.99 graduated, and *just over half of those with pre-program GPAs below 2.5 graduated.*

However, what is more compelling for future consideration is how these rates compare to the rates of those in the comparison sample. The two-thirds graduation rate of those with pre-program GPAs of 3.0 or higher was not as high as the 90% graduation rate of comparison sample students in that GPA range. Although these data cannot be considered conclusive, *the data at least raise the question of the extent to which the program should be concentrating attention on such high-GPA students, who appear to be relatively likely to graduate successfully on their own*, without the need for the advocacy and supports provided by the program. The program correctly notes that there may be extenuating circumstances that make it justifiable to admit such high-GPA students on an occasional basis, because of various at-risk factors, and such circumstances may not have been able to be accounted for by the matching process that generated the comparison sample. Thus *the program should presumably continue to admit some high-GPA students, but in terms of ultimate impact, this does not appear to be a group that the program should devote a considerable amount of time to in the future.*

> **2/3 of 9th-grade students entering the program with high GPA rates graduate, but similar students not in HW-SC are even more likely to graduate, raising questions about how many 3.0+ students should be admitted in the future.**

> **Those entering HW-SC with GPAs below 2.0 are least likely to graduate (50% rate), but they graduate at 3 times the rates of similar students without HW-SC intervention.**

At the other end of the GPA spectrum, only half of the HW-SC students with pre-program GPAs below 2.0 ultimately graduated. This would on the surface suggest a group with which the program has not been especially successful. However, among comparison sample students with such GPA levels, only 15% ultimately graduated. Thus, *although in absolute terms the program has been less successful in helping low-GPA entrants graduate, the graduation rate with program supports for such students has been more than three times higher than for those without such supports. In general, the program appears to have its greatest impact, compared to those in the comparison sample, with students entering the program with GPAs below 2.5, and especially among those with pre-program GPAs below 2.0.*

Implications: The program's successful graduation rates are higher with students who enter the program with a GPA of 2.5 or more. But compared to similar students in the comparison sample, the HW-SC has less marginal impact in improving graduation rates of such students than it does with students entering the program with GPAs of less than 2.5, and especially those below 2.0. So the program faces a dilemma concerning the type of student it should be primarily focusing on in the future, i.e., of what the mix of academic skills of incoming students should be.

If HW-SC admits mostly students with GPAs of 2.5 or higher (and especially of 3.0 or more), it will improve its overall program graduation rates, but it is likely that many of those students would graduate anyway, with or without the program's support. On the other hand, *if the program admits mostly students with GPAs below 2.5, and especially if it were to change its criteria to select more students with GPAs below 2.0, its overall graduation rates would decline, but it would be having its greatest marginal impact, compared to the graduation rates to be expected without the program supports.* The resolution of this issue presumably would need to be worked out in conjunction with program funders. It may be that the program should simply continue to select and admit a wide range of students, as it does now, but whatever it ultimately decides to do, it is likely to need additional academic supports if it is to continue to successfully improve the graduation prospects of students entering the program with relatively low GPAs.

Conclusions

Students in HW-SC graduate at twice the rate of similar students without such program supports. But the success rates are lower among entering 7th- and 8th-graders, among those with low entering GPAs, and among those in poverty—all subgroups which have been increasing within the program in recent years. Increased attention will be needed on strengthening academic supports and job placement efforts within the program in order to maintain or increase the program's impact on graduation rates in the future.

6. POST-GRADUATION STATUS

HW-SC annually tracks the post-graduation destination plans of all program graduates, including both post-secondary education and employment plans. Although CGR was not able to independently verify program data on post-graduation destination, or to compare such data with comparable comparison sample information, data for the past five graduating classes of HW-SC students have been fairly consistent from year to year in the proportions of students who continue with their education, and those who are employed following graduation.

Post-Secondary Education

Of those HW-SC students who successfully graduate from high school, significant proportions (more than 75%) continue on to some form of post-secondary education. Proportions reported by the program for the past five years were: 84%, 100% (which appears to have either been a fluke or based on overly optimistic assumptions), 75%, 76%, and 76%. The program's Coordinator for Seniors and Graduates indicates that 75% is a realistic goal for post-secondary education for this population, and it is a goal that appears to have been consistently met.

Given the fact that many of these students come from families which have little or no history of post-secondary education, these proportions appear to represent no small accomplishment. Indeed, countywide figures from the NYS Education Department on proportions of Monroe County graduates going onto college have typically averaged around 80%, with a 10-year high of 85% in 2000-01. Given that those proportions include all the suburban school districts as well as the city, the fact that the HW-SC proportions have consistently been only slightly lower would suggest a successful outcome for the program.[11]

75% or more of program graduates go on to post-secondary education; 1/3 or less go to 4-year colleges.

On the other hand, it seems reasonable to expect that substantial proportions of the post-secondary destinations countywide are to 4-year colleges and universities. Such is typically not the case with HW-SC graduates. In most years, fewer than half of the program's graduates go on to 4-year schools, at least initially. For

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[11] No comparable data on post-secondary education were available for the comparison sample used in this study.

example, among 83 graduates during the past two years who reported continuing their education, 10 reported going to various schools such as Rochester Business Institute, culinary academies, fire academies, etc., and 48 to MCC or other community colleges. Thus, in the past two years, between a quarter to a third of the graduates planned to attend 4-year colleges or universities.

This reality should in no way be viewed as denigrating the accomplishments of the individuals or of the program. As noted, for many of these students this is a remarkable achievement given what they have had to overcome to graduate and enroll in college. For some, community college represents a realistic, affordable first step following graduation. Some may well ultimately transfer to a 4-year school. Program officials have indicated that they believe a realistic goal for the program is to consistently have at least half of its graduates each year attending 4-year colleges or universities. But the viability of attaining that goal on a consistent basis is in large part contingent on improved academic performance by the students in the program. The current reality is that, given the relatively low average grades of most of the students in the program throughout their high school years (as shown in more detail in the next chapter), *opportunities for many of the program's graduates will be limited unless additional resources are focused in the future on strengthening the academic supports available through the program.*

In order to assess the ultimate impact the program has on helping students succeed at the post-secondary level, it would be necessary not only to track the students' immediate post-graduation plans, but also to determine what proportion of students stay in school and successfully obtain various levels of degrees. Such tracking has not historically been done by the program, although the Coordinator for Seniors and Graduates is beginning with this year's graduates to provide such ongoing follow-up efforts. A special one-time effort to determine the status of 1998 HW-SC graduates has yielded the following information to date: Based on contacts with 53% of that year's 58 graduates, 94% reported having had at least some post-secondary educational experience since graduating from high school, and 41% reported having graduated with a post-secondary degree of some type.

One factor that certainly impacts a student's decision about post-secondary educational opportunities is the extent to which scholarships are available. CGR was not able to obtain consistent data on the number of HW-SC graduates who have obtained scholarships in the past, but data on the 2003 graduates indicated that 22 of 54 graduates had obtained some type of scholarships, including 16 offered by Wegmans. The program has been increasingly successful in obtaining commitments for scholarships at several local and regional colleges and universities, with scholarships guaranteed to HW-SC students who are accepted by the institutions. Such scholarship opportunities should provide additional incentives for program staff to use to help motivate students to maintain and improve their grades in order to be able to meet application standards. More will be discussed in subsequent sections of the report about the academic, grade point average, and aptitude test implications for college and scholarship opportunities for future HW-SC students.

Post-Secondary Employment

Over the past five years, an average of about 80% of all graduates reported being employed post-graduation: 84%, 85%, 77%, 78%, and 70%, respectively. Over these years, the employer in most cases has been Wegmans.

However, it is difficult to interpret these data. The program presents the difference between numbers employed and the total number of graduates as the unemployed proportion, when in fact a number of those without jobs may be full-time students. There is no distinction between the numbers of persons who are full-time students, full-time employees, part-time employees not in school, students with part-time or summer jobs, and persons who are indeed unemployed and not in school. *In order for post-graduate employment status to be a more meaningful outcome measure for the program in the future, it would be important to be able to make these distinctions in the way in which the data are collected and reported.* Recent discussions with the Coordinator who is now in charge of maintaining such information suggest that this is a change that will be made. In the future it would be most helpful to also be able to routinely track employment, as well as educational involvement, on a post-program basis. These issues are discussed further in a later chapter, in the context of plans for more extensive post-program follow-up with HW-SC graduates.

7. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Several references have been made in earlier sections of this report to the role of academic performance, as assessed by a student's grade point average (GPA), in the selection of students into the HW-SC, and as a contributor to the retention and graduation rates of students exposed to the program. In this chapter, we examine how HW-SC students have performed academically, how that performance compares to matched similar non-HW-SC students, and how academic achievement levels have varied over time.

Academic achievement levels were analyzed using each student's annual grade point average for each individual year. The data are presented in two different ways: averages were calculated across all students in different categories as an indicator of how the average student in each category fared; and the proportion of students whose annual GPA was 2.0 or higher was calculated (since that proportion relates to one of the program's goals).

Grade Point Averages Decline After Middle School

Table 6 on the next page tracks GPAs for the HW-SC cohorts which had reached their senior years by 2002-03 (and their comparison sample counterparts). All entering cohorts of students are grouped by their entry grades; thus, for example, the table includes data for students in five entering 10th-grade classes, or cohorts, which have reached their senior years, four such 9th-grade cohorts, and so on, and those cohorts are all grouped together by entering grade in the table.[12] Analyses include all students in these cohorts who remained in the HW-SC for at least seven months; their GPAs were tracked from year to year, as long as they remained students in the School District, whether or not they remained active in HW-SC after the seven-month minimum period. The GPAs presented in the table represent the averages of

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[12] Data are presented for students whose cohorts have reached their respective senior years, except for 7th grade. Since only two 7th-grade cohorts in our database have reached their senior years, and the numbers in those cohorts were too small for meaningful GPA analyses, the 7th-grade data in the table include students in the 7th-grade cohorts which have not yet reached their senior years.

all such HW-SC students (and their comparison sample matches) who remained in school in each succeeding year.[13]

Table 6: Grade Point Averages for Students Remaining in Each Grade, by Grade Cohort at Program Entry

Entry Grade/Sample	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Graduates
HW-SC Students								
7th Grade	2.5	2.4	2.2	1.5	1.3	1.4	---	---
8th Grade		2.9	2.3	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.9	2.3
9th Grade			2.7	2.0	1.7	1.9	2.2	2.5
10th Grade				2.5	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.6
Comparison Sample								
7th Grade		2.3	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.3	---	---
8th Grade			1.9	1.1	1.8	2.6*	2.0*	2.5*
9th Grade				1.5	1.8	1.8	2.2	2.5
10th Grade					2.0	1.9	2.8*	2.5

*Data based on fewer than 10 students still in school at that stage. Note: Shaded grades represent the average GPAs for students the year prior to entering HW-SC. Comparable data for the comparison sample students were too unreliable to report. Even though, except for the 7th-grade cohort, these data are based on only those cohorts which had reached their senior years (and their matched comparison sample students), the average GPAs were very similar from grade to grade for other cohorts which had not yet reached their senior years.

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[13] For some students in each cohort, GPA data were missing from School District records for certain years. Typically in such cases, data for a student were available for all years but one. For the overwhelming majority of students, GPA data were available for all years. Thus the averages in the table are based on the number of students still in school during each year for whom GPA data were available.

The central finding from even a cursory examination of the GPA data is that *average grades have clearly declined among HW-SC students after they entered the program, and this decline was most pronounced among students making the transition from middle school to high school.* This latter pattern seems to apply not just to this program, as it is consistent with other research as well. Students who first entered the program in 7th or 8th grades, with solid C+ or better averages, experienced average declines of about 33% in their GPAs between 8th and 9th grades. Of those students who remained in school (many of those with the lowest GPAs dropped out each year, as described in Chapter 5), their typical academic performance averaged well below a 2.0 GPA between 9th and 11th grades, before experiencing some resurgence among seniors and those who graduated.

Only among students who entered HW-SC for the first time in high school, and particularly in 10th grade, was there a more consistent level of academic performance from grade to grade.

Average GPAs improved in all cohorts among seniors and those students who successfully graduated, partly as a result of self-selection, as the stronger students tended to survive, and also in part as a result of students making a final push to finish their high school careers on a positive note. But even with the improved academic performance in the senior year, the overall high school transcript for most of these students would still have reflected a relatively low cumulative GPA across the high school years, thereby limiting the range of post-secondary options available to many of the students, as noted in the previous chapter.

HW-SC Impacts on Graduation Rates, Not on GPA Levels

As indicated in Table 6, the patterns described above for students in the HW-SC program were not that different from students in the matched comparison sample. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the comparison sample proportions are to some extent artificially inflated by the fact that they reflect only the GPAs of relatively small proportions of students who were still in school at each grade level, so many of the comparison sample students who would be likely to have had even lower levels of academic achievement had previously dropped out of school, as described above in Chapter 5. Nonetheless, even with that factored in, although the averages were slightly different, the basic

> **Grades drop significantly between middle and high school, with some resurgence by students' senior years, if they are still in school.**

pattern was the same in the comparison sample as within the program students: declining GPAs between middle and high school grades, followed by mediocre academic performance between 9th and 11th grades, with an upswing in grades during each cohort's senior year. The resulting conclusion is *that little or no improvement in the academic achievement levels of program students can be attributed to the HW-SC,* as their average performance levels, as measured by the annual GPA, were not significantly different from those of the comparison sample students not exposed to the program.

> **Although the program has a substantial impact on increasing retention and graduation rates, it has not improved overall academic achievement levels for those who remained in school.**

The program clearly has a major impact in helping students remain in school and on course to graduate. That is and has been its core mission, and it has succeeded in making that possible for the majority of its students, as described in Chapter 5. But among those students it helps to keep enrolled and on track to graduate, the program has not thus far been able to help boost their academic performance over and above what it was for similar students not enrolled in the W-SC.

The program is meeting its central challenge of keeping at-risk, dropout-prone students in school and on track to receive their degrees. But, as it looks to building on its strong foundation and strengthening its services to enhance its impact for the future, it will be necessary to find ways to strengthen the core academic supports available to its students—both because that will help increase the overall graduation rates even beyond those discussed in Chapter 5, and because it will help strengthen the cumulative academic record of those who do graduate, and thereby expand the post-secondary options available to them upon graduation. *Such an enhancement of services will be needed to help produce a more skilled, academically-prepared set of graduates who will be both qualified for college admission and also competent to handle the challenges of the future work force.*

Declining Achievement Levels Since 1999

In the academic year of 1998-99, the HW-SC modified its admission/eligibility criteria to enable students with GPAs between 2.0 and 2.99 to be admitted to the program, rather than the previous requirements that students have between a 2.5 and a 2.99 GPA to be eligible. *As students with lower GPAs were admitted to the program to begin with, it is not surprising that this has negatively affected the overall GPAs of the entire program student profile as they continued through school.* The average annual GPAs for all students still in

school, regardless of their entering cohorts, who spent at least seven months in the program, are tracked from grade to grade in Table 7 below. Those average grades are compared for the first two years of the program under Hillside, before the change in eligibility requirements, versus the years since the change was instituted. And those averages are also compared with average GPAs during those same years for the students in the comparison sample.

Table 7: Grade Point Averages for HW-SC and Comparison Sample Students Remaining in Each Grade, for 1997 and 1998 Years Versus Subsequent Academic Years

Academic Year/Sample	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Graduates
HW-SC Students					
1996-97 and 1997-98	2.9	2.5	2.6	2.9	3.0
1998-99 and beyond	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.9	2.3
Comparison Sample					
1996-97 and 1997-98	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.9	2.2
1998-99 and beyond	1.7	1.9	1.9	2.5	2.5

Note: 7th and 8th grades are not included in this table because there were too few students admitted to the program in the first two years in those grades to enable meaningful comparisons to be made between the years. The averages represent the composite GPAs for all students enrolled in a city school in the specified grade during the appropriate years, regardless of the year and grade in which they first entered the program (or the matched comparison sample).

> **As the program has changed its GPA eligibility admission requirements, HW-SC academic achievement levels have declined at all grade levels.**

Clearly, in the early years of the program, when it officially admitted only students with a 2.5 GPA or higher, its students consistently maintained GPAs from grade to grade in the C+ to B range, between 2.5 and 3.0. During those years, students in the program consistently academically outperformed their comparison sample peers. Since the introduction of the broader eligibility criteria, more students have entered the program not only at the lower end of the expanded eligibility range, but also below the 2.0 cutoff, as more and more exceptions were made to bring in

students at lower levels of achievement. Most of those students have remained at the lower achievement levels, even as they have remained enrolled in school, thereby creating the low GPAs reflected in the first two tables in this chapter.

Academic Performance Levels vs. Program Goals

One of the stated goals of the program is to have at least half of the program participants maintaining a GPA of at least 2.0 while they are in the program. As shown in Table 8, and as would be expected from the average GPAs shown above, the program's record against this goal is mixed.

Table 8: Percentage of Students Remaining in School in Each Grade with GPAs of 2.0 or Higher, by Grade Cohort at Program Entry

Entry Grade/Sample	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Graduates
HW-SC Students							
7th Grade	75	64	32	28	29	---	---
8th Grade		74	36	31	35	52	79
9th Grade			52	37	49	62	76
10th Grade				54	55	61	76
Comparison Sample							
7th Grade	75	60	47	47	23	---	---
8th Grade		63	17	58	67*	50*	67*
9th Grade			46	52	40	66	78
10th Grade				71	63	75*	90

*Data based on fewer than 10 students still in school at that stage. Except for the 7th-grade cohort, these data are based on only those cohorts which had reached their senior years (and their matched comparison sample students). However, the proportions reflected in this table were very similar from grade to grade for other cohorts which had not yet reached their senior years.

When students start out in the program, the goal of having at least half of all students with GPAs of 2.0 or more is consistently met—especially in middle school, where two-thirds to three-quarters of the students met or exceeded the goal, including many at 2.5 or higher (and often 3.0+). However, once these cohorts hit high school, the goals ceased to be met, as between 9th and 11th grades, only about a third of all students still in school had GPAs as high as 2.0. Not until the cohorts reached the 12th grade was the 50% goal reached again.

For those entering the program for the first time in the 9th grade, the declines were not as steep as for middle school entrants, but even after the 9th-grade entry year, the 50% goal was not met until the senior year across all 9th-grade cohorts. Among students entering the program in the 10th grade, more than half of the students have been at or above the 2.0 level consistently in each grade.

Despite the performance declines during the earlier high school years, *each cohort of students, by the time they reached their senior year, had met the 50% goal, and among those who had graduated, more than three-quarters had met or exceeded the goal*—including 14% of the 8th-grade cohort graduates, 23% of the 9th-grade cohorts, and 31% of the 10th-grade graduates who had final GPAs of 3.0 or higher. So *the ability to perform well academically is present, at least for a substantial number of the program's students, but for most, that ability has typically taken a long time to be fully unleashed, and many other students have dropped by the wayside in the meantime.*

Again, the data in this table simply reconfirm what has been stated above, that the program has added little or nothing to the average academic performance of its students over and above the performance of students in the comparison sample, i.e., the performance levels that could be expected without the added program supports. *The program impact has been clear and substantial in keeping students in school, but not in enhancing their levels of academic achievement while there.*

Clarification of Data Differences

Throughout this chapter, we have reported data which indicate GPA averages which dip below 2.0 during high school years for students exposed to the HW-SC program for at least seven months. During those same years, well under half of the students

> **HW-SC students typically fall short of program GPA goals in high school years, until their senior years.**

met the program goal of a minimum 2.0 GPA. Meanwhile, the program has published data that indicate that the overall average GPA for all participants in the program has been about 2.1 for each of the past two academic years. Why these apparent discrepancies? Are there reporting errors in either the HW-SC or CGR data? Are there logical explanations for these apparent differences?

The answer is that both sets of data are correct, and they are not inconsistent. They are simply based on different premises. The program's reported annual data appropriately include everyone in the program during the academic year, including the first-year students who, as our data have shown, come in with much higher GPA levels than many of them maintain in subsequent years. Thus the HW-SC reported annual averages are as high as they are because they are heavily influenced by the relatively high GPAs of the large numbers of new students entering the program each year. But if, as we suggest, the program's reported data in the future were to be broken down by each student's year or grade in the program, as we needed to do for our analyses, they would show similar patterns to what the CGR data showed. Our reported data are based on tracking students over time, and as noted earlier in the chapter, in early years of exposure to the program, the majority of students have exceeded the 2.0 GPA level, and the majority of those who remained in school by their senior year have also exceeded the 2.0 level. But in between those years, the 2.0 level of attainment has remained elusive for most of the students who have not already left school.

As a result, we have raised serious questions about the need for the program and its funders to consider instituting initiatives to strengthen the academic achievement levels of the program, and to ultimately thereby help increase the overall program graduation rates as well. We believe program officials will agree with our conclusions, and will understand the rationale for the differences in both sets of reported data.

Differential GPA Levels by Different Student Groups

We have analyzed the academic achievement levels of the students in the HW-SC program against various descriptive characteristics of the students, to determine if the program has been more or less successful with specific categories or types of students. Although there were clear differences between different groups of students

in retention and graduation rates, there were few such obvious differences between subgroups of students in terms of academic achievement levels.

Gender Differences

Although not as pronounced as the differences noted previously in retention and graduation rates, female students did do somewhat better than their male counterparts on average grades. In each cohort, their GPAs averaged .2 or .3 higher than male students in the program, and their average grades were also slightly higher than their comparison sample peers. Girls were also 10% to 15% higher than males and than comparison group girls in proportions with GPAs of 2.0 or higher. Thus *the program has had some impact in improving academic achievement levels among girls exposed to the program.* However, it has had little impact on the academic performance of boys in the program, over and above what their performance levels would have been without program supports. *The program helps keep boys in school, but has little additional impact on their academic achievement levels while there.*

> **HW-SC has helped improve academic achievement levels among girls, but not among boys.**

Implications: The program needs to work on improving academic achievement for all students, but needs to target its efforts especially to the young males in the program.

Race/Ethnic Differences

Any differences that might appear in academic achievement between different racial/ethnic groups are difficult to determine from the data, because of the small numbers of students (other than African-Americans) remaining in each grade on whom the GPA calculations could be conducted. White students in the program appear to do slightly better academically than other groups, but the numbers on which those analyses were performed are small, so no definitive conclusions can be drawn. Other than the significant differences in retention and graduation outcomes reported earlier, no major racial/ethnic differences in impact on achievement can be discerned from the data.

Poverty/Non-Poverty Differences

Students in the program who receive free or reduced-price lunches actually appear to have done worse academically than their matched peers not exposed to the program. High school grades averaged about .3 of a point lower, with lower proportions of students with GPAs of 2.0 or higher.

The program has had little if any impact in improving GPAs among poverty-level students.

Implications: Although the program has had some limited impact in improving graduation prospects for poverty-level students, it appears to have had little or no impact in helping to improve academic achievement levels among this population. As noted earlier, the program needs to find ways to help improve the academic levels and retention of these students, presumably at least in part by more effectively linking academics and job availability.

Differences by Pre-Program GPA Levels

Not surprisingly, those who entered the program with low GPAs continued to achieve academically at lower levels than other students in the program, while those who entered with GPAs of 3.0 or higher continued to outperform the majority of other students. Beyond those expected findings, there were few other insights from the data. Although, as emphasized in Chapter 5, those in the program with the lowest pre-program GPA levels had significantly higher retention and graduation rates than did their comparison group counterparts, no such effect was found concerning academic achievement. While many of those in the program who entered with low GPAs did improve their grades while in the program, the average grades were not at a level any different from those with similar GPAs not exposed to the program. Nor were there any other indications that people who entered the program at different achievement levels did any better academically over time than their matched comparison students.

Although improving retention and graduation rates among low-GPA students, the program has not improved academic achievement levels among the retained students, compared with similar students not in the program.

Implications: Students with entering GPAs of less than 2.5, and especially those below 2.0, are likely to need special academic attention if they are to be successful in staying in school and graduating at high levels in the future.

Conclusions

The HW-SC program is successful in keeping large numbers of students in school who would otherwise drop out. *But HW-SC needs to be linked with strong academic support services in the future if it is to not only prevent dropouts and graduate more students who would otherwise leave school without a diploma, but also assure that those students meet standards needed to be competitive and productive in both post-secondary educational opportunities and the future job market.*

8. STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Obviously academic achievement and ultimate graduation are functions in part of class attendance: it is difficult for students to achieve in the classroom if they are absent significant amounts of the time. With that in mind, HW-SC has established a goal that 70% of all program participants should attend at least 90% of all possible days during the school year.

Student attendance levels were analyzed using each student's annual attendance percentage for each individual year. The data are presented in two different ways: averages were calculated across all students in different categories as an indicator of how frequently the average student in each category attended; and the proportion of students whose annual attendance rate was 90% or higher was calculated.

Attendance Declines by Grade

Table 9 on the next page tracks average attendance for HW-SC cohorts which had reached their senior years by 2002-03 (and their comparison sample counterparts). As with GPA data in Table 6 in the previous chapter, all entering cohorts of students are grouped by their entry grades; thus, for example, the table includes data for students in five entering 10th-grade cohorts which have reached their senior years, four such 9th-grade cohorts, and so on, and those cohorts were all grouped together in the table by entering grade.[14] Analyses include all students in these cohorts who remained in HW-SC for at least seven months; their attendance was tracked from year to year, as long as they remained students in the School District, whether or not they remained active in HW-SC after the seven-month minimum period. The data in the table represent the average annual attendance of all such HW-SC students (and their comparison sample matches) who remained in school in each succeeding year (for whom attendance data were available from District records, which was typically the case).

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[14] Data are presented for students whose cohorts have reached their respective senior years, except for 7th grade. Since only two 7th-grade cohorts in our database have reached their senior years, and the numbers in those cohorts were too small for meaningful analyses of attendance data, the 7th-grade data in the table include students in the 7th-grade cohorts which have not yet reached their senior years.

Table 9: Average Annual Attendance for Students Remaining in School in Each Grade, by Grade Cohort at Program Entry

Entry Grade/Sample	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Graduates
HW-SC Students								
7th Grade	94	93	90	85	77	77	---	---
8th Grade		92	93	88	82	78	77	87
9th Grade			93	90	87	86	86	90
10th Grade				93	90	88	84	89
Comparison Sample								
7th Grade	91	90	89	83	84	85	---	---
8th Grade		89	90	85	82	77	72	87
9th Grade			80	75	67	78	84	89
10th Grade				83	77	80	78	87

Note: Shaded grades represent the average attendance for students the year prior to entering HW-SC (and their matched comparison sample students). In developing the matched comparison sample, we were not able to control for attendance. It is clear that, as a result, the "pre-entry" equivalent year's average attendance for the comparison sample was often considerably lower than for their counterparts in the program. Subsequent analyses indicated, however, that these differences had no significant effect in analyses of student retention, graduation, or academic achievement levels.

Several points are worth noting about the Table 9 data:

❖ Although to a lesser extent than with the GPA data, a similar pattern existed with attendance data. *Despite the program's interventions, average attendance rates declined steadily by grade among those exposed to HW-SC. The declines were particularly notable in the transition between middle school and high school years*, but continued beyond as

well, with attendance only increasing again among students in their graduating year (as was the case with GPAs).

❖ *Declines were most precipitous among students who entered HW-SC in middle school* (e.g., attendance for 7th-graders declined from 93% in their first year in the program to an average of 77% in the 11th grade; 8th-graders experienced a similar decline). Not only were the dropout rates highest and graduation rates lowest among those entering the program in 7th and 8th grades (see Chapter 5), but among those who remained in school in each grade, their academic achievement and attendance levels were consistently lower than among those who entered the program for the first time in high school. This issue, and its implications for strengthened transition efforts by the program, will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

❖ It is interesting to note that, even though poor attendance is one of the risk factors considered in determining eligibility for the program, the overall attendance in the year before students entered the program averaged 93% across all entering cohorts. *This at least suggests the possibility that attendance is not considered a major factor in the admissions decision, and that perhaps more students having attendance problems might in the future be considered as viable candidates for program admission*, with the assumption that the program's efforts could be focused specifically on helping to find incentives to help the students improve their attendance and, in the process, their academic achievement levels as well.

Modest Program Impact on Attendance

❖ During the middle school years, HW-SC students maintained higher attendance levels than their counterparts in the comparison sample. Also, the average middle school attendance among program participants of about 92% has been consistently higher than the overall City School District average attendance rate for middle schools, which has hovered consistently around the 89.5% level in recent years.

❖ In the high school years, HW-SC students attended at a slightly higher level than did their peers in the comparison sample, with the exception of 7th-grade cohort students, whose attendance in 10th and 11th grades was significantly lower than the rates of comparison sample students. Also, despite the fact that attendance in the high school years for students exposed to HW-SC rarely reached 90% and averaged closer to 85% over the years,

> **Graduation, attendance and academic achievement levels have been lower among students entering HW-SC in middle school than in high school years.**

those rates were consistently higher than the overall District attendance rates for all high school students of between 80% and 82% in recent years.

> **Program efforts have had some limited impact in improving student attendance compared to similar students not in the program.**

Overall, it appears to be fair to conclude that *the program has had some marginal impact on helping to improve student attendance to a level slightly higher than what it would have been for students had they not been exposed to the program.* HW-SC's impact on attendance is not nearly as significant as its impact on retention and graduation rates, but any improvements in attendance are certainly likely to be contributors to higher ultimate graduation rates. The question becomes one of whether there are ways that the program can build on its modest success in improving attendance to have an even more dramatic impact in the future, especially within the high school years.

Focus Needed on High School Attendance Intervention

In that context, it is worth noting that for the past two years, HW-SC has reported annual average attendance of 90% to 91% across all active participants. As with the previous discussion about GPA levels, this is an accurate representation of overall attendance levels among those in the program, but it is heavily influenced by the high attendance levels of incoming students. *The data suggest that the program should be disaggregating these data and looking beyond the overall figures to explore what can be done to improve attendance and, in the process, academic achievement, for subgroups of students beyond their entry years in the program.*

Attendance Rates vs. Program Goals

As noted above, one of the program's stated goals is to have 70% of all participants with attendance levels of 90% or higher. Table 10 on the next page indicates that HW-SC is not nearly at that level, except among some entering cohorts in their initial years in the program. Not surprisingly, the data reflect the overall average attendance patterns in the previous table of higher proportions of students with relatively high levels of attendance in the middle school years, followed by significant declines once they reach high school. *Among students who entered the program in 7th or 8th grades, typically fewer than half of those still in school in each high school grade attended at the 90% or higher level. Among students who entered for the first time in high school, the proportions were somewhat higher, typically ranging from about 55% to 65% of the students with attendance rates of 90% or more.*

Table 10: Percentage of Students Remaining in School in Each Grade with Annual Attendance of 90% or Higher, by Grade Cohort at Program Entry

Entry Grade/Sample	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Graduates
HW-SC Students							
7th Grade	80%	69%	53%	39%	44%	--	---
8th Grade		60	51	50	42	21	28
9th Grade			70	59	62	55	63
10th Grade				56	55	48	61
Comparison Sample							
7th Grade	72	62	56	58	44	---	---
8th Grade		50	48	42	61	40*	72*
9th Grade			30	35	45	54	66
10th Grade				33	49	63	52

*Data based on fewer than 10 students still in school at that stage. Except for the 7th-grade cohort, these data are based on only those cohorts which had reached their senior years (and their matched comparison sample students).

There is little initial evidence from the data above that the program has any incremental impact on increasing the proportions of students with relatively high (90%+) attendance rates, over and above what they would have been without the program. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the comparison sample proportions are to some extent artificially inflated by the fact that they reflect only the attendance of relatively small proportions of students who are still in school at each grade level, so many of the comparison sample students who would be likely to have had even lower levels of attendance had previously dropped out of school. Factoring in an adjustment for that important variable, the

program appears to be having a small marginal positive impact on the numbers of students with relatively high attendance.

But the bottom line remains as suggested above: For those students who remain with the program for at least seven months, *far fewer than the goal of 70% of those who remain in school after their first year in the program continue to attend school as much as 90% of the time.* These data, reflecting the large proportions of students who miss class at least 10% of the time (including about a third of the students who are absent at least 15% of the time), suggest—perhaps even more than the *average* attendance figures—the extent to which individual students are not in class often enough to have any realistic chance of mastering the material. *The data underscore the need to place more extensive emphasis in the future on related needs to strengthen the academic support aspects of the program and to motivate students to attend class on a regular basis.*

Differential Attendance Rates by Different Student Groups

Analyses of attendance patterns of students in HW-SC against various descriptive characteristics of the students revealed relatively few differences of significance between different subgroups. Average attendance profiles of different student subgroups were compared against each other, and against their matched similar students in the comparison sample.

Gender Differences

In each of the past two years, HW-SC annual reports indicated that males in the program have had slightly higher attendance rates than females (91% vs. 89% in 2001-02, and 92% vs. 90% in 2002-03). Those rates are based on all students enrolled in the program in each of those years. As noted above, our rates were calculated in different ways, based on the students who remained in school in each succeeding year. Thus our calculated attendance percentages were lower, and our findings of gender differences were slightly different than the program's reported findings.

In our analyses, the males in the program did have slightly higher attendance rates, on average, during the middle school years, although there were no significant differences during the high school years, with variations from year to year. However, when contrasted with comparison group students, girls exposed to the program attended at a slightly higher level than their matched peers, especially in high school (an average of about three or four percentage points a year), while there were no significant

differences in attendance rates between boys in the program vs. in the comparison sample. Thus *the supports offered by the program appear to have had a slight impact in improving school attendance for the young women in the program, but little direct impact in improving attendance for the young men* over and above what would have occurred in the absence of the program.

Implications: As with academic achievement, the program needs to focus attention on improving attendance for all students, but with particular attention on working with males in high school.

The program has helped to improve attendance slightly among girls, but not among boys, compared with similar students not in the program.

Race/Ethnic Differences

Other than African-American students, the numbers of students in other racial/ethnic categories remaining in school in each grade became so small in most cases that little comparative analysis of attendance patterns could be conducted. However, it was possible to discern two observations of note from the limited data available.

❖ HW-SC does not appear to have had any direct impact on improving attendance for African-American students in the program. That is, when attendance for black students exposed to the program was compared with their counterparts in the comparison sample, there were no significant differences between the groups.

❖ *The attendance of Hispanic students tended to be lower than that of other groups of students* (by an average of about seven points per year). Nonetheless, the data, even with the small numbers involved, seem to indicate that the program has had an effect on improving attendance among its Hispanic students, especially during the high school years. Clearly further improvement is needed, but *the program appears to have helped narrow the attendance gap compared to what it would have been without program intervention.*

Though attendance among Hispanic HW-SC students is low, it is better than it would have been without the program's efforts.

Implications: Further efforts are needed by HW-SC to build on current preliminary successes to help motivate Hispanics to attend classes more regularly, which in turn should help improve the low Hispanic retention/graduation rates referenced in Chapter 5.

Poverty/Non-Poverty Differences

Those who pay for their own lunches, i.e., students not considered to be in poverty, had slightly higher attendance levels than did the students in poverty (free and reduced-price lunches), though the differences were typically no more than two or three percentage

points, if that. However, *the program appears to have had no significant impact in improving attendance for the poverty-level students, while on the other hand attendance for the non-poverty students in the program was often several percentage points higher than it would have been without the program's intervention.*

The program has had more impact in improving attendance among non-poverty students than among students in poverty.

Implications: The program's support services may mix more effectively with presumed greater individual and family assets available to the non-poverty students. As noted earlier, the challenge for HW-SC, as it is for the School District in general, is to find ways to have a greater impact on those students with fewer resources.

Differences by Pre-Program GPA Levels

Those students who entered the program with a grade point average below 2.0 tended to have somewhat lower attendance rates than did students with higher GPAs (an average of about five points lower). However, as with Hispanic students, compared with their matched comparison sample peers, those students in the program with low GPAs had higher attendance than would have been the case without the program's intervention (an effect of about three points on the average). Thus, *while those students entering the program with low GPAs have not typically attended classes at a high level, they are doing so more frequently than they would without HW-SC efforts.*

W-SC has helped improve attendance among low-GPA students, though attendance levels remained low among this subgroup.

Implications: The program has made some progress in working with students who enter with low GPAs, and needs to continue to build on those efforts to help increase their attendance and academic achievement levels.

Conclusions

We have advocated strengthening academic support services for the program. Such supports could reasonably be expected to also help provide increased motivation for students to attend class more regularly. By the same token, finding ways to get students to attend class more regularly should in turn help improve academic achievement levels. It is a "chicken and egg" issue, and *efforts to address the issue simultaneously from both attendance and achievement perspectives are needed.*

9. STUDENT SUSPENSIONS

Although reduction of student suspensions is not an explicit goal of HW-SC, CGR examined CSD data to see if program efforts had any indirect effect on reducing the incidence of suspensions. A history of previous suspensions ("two or more in- or out-of-school suspensions") is listed as one of the five "risk indicators" considered as part of a student's potential eligibility for HW-SC.

Student suspensions were analyzed several ways: the numbers and proportions of students in each cohort who were suspended at least once in a year; the total and average number of suspensions for students remaining in school each year; and the average number of days of suspensions each year.

Total Suspensions Decline, but HW-SC Impact Limited

Table 11 on the next page tracks the average number of suspensions for HW-SC cohorts which had reached their senior years by 2002-03 (and their comparison sample counterparts). As in the previous chapters, all entering cohorts of students are grouped by their entry grades.[15] Analyses include all students in these cohorts who remained in HW-SC for at least seven months. Their suspensions were tracked from year to year, as long as they remained students in the School District, whether or not they remained active in HW-SC after the seven-month minimum period. The data in the table represent the average annual number of suspensions of all such HW-SC students (and their comparison sample matches) who remained in school in each succeeding year (for whom suspension data were available from District records, which was typically the case).

Consistent with GPA and attendance data, *average numbers of suspensions among HW-SC students declined between middle and high school years.* In contrast to the first two indicators, however, in this case such a decline represents a positive trend, with fewer suspensions per students remaining in school nearly each successive year. Such

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[15] Data are presented for students whose cohorts have reached their respective senior years, except for 7th grade. Since only two 7th-grade cohorts in our database have reached their senior years, and the numbers in those cohorts were too small for meaningful analyses of attendance data, the 7th-grade data in the table include only students in the 7th-grade cohorts which have not yet reached their senior years.

a trend of fewer suspensions in high school years is also consistent with overall School District trends, as discussed further below.

Table 11: Average Number of Suspensions for Students Remaining in School in Each Grade, by Grade Cohort at Program Entry

Entry Grade/Sample	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Graduates
HW-SC Students								
7th Grade	0.7	1.1	1.2	0.8	0.5	0.3	---	---
8th Grade		0.7	1.1	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4
9th Grade			0.7	0.7	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.4
10th Grade				0.3	0.5	0.7	0.4	0.2
Comparison Sample								
7th Grade	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.3	---	---
8th Grade		0.9	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3*	0.4*
9th Grade			0.9	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.3
10th Grade				0.6	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.1

* Data based on fewer than 10 students still in school at that stage.
Note: Shaded grades represent the average number of suspensions for students the year prior to entering HW-SC (and their matched comparison sample students).

But beyond the overall obvious positive implications for HW-SC associated with the downward trends in numbers of suspensions per year, some less positive observations are also important to note:

❖ For all grade cohorts, rather than declining, as might have been expected, the average number of suspensions per HW-SC student actually increased or stayed the same in the year they entered the program, compared to the previous pre-program year. However,

such increases could simply reflect the fact that many of the students may have experienced most if not all of the suspensions in the same year of program entry, but prior to formally entering the program. Thus at least some of the apparent increase may not in fact have occurred while the students were in the program. (There is no way to determine the timing of the suspensions from the District's summary data.) And, beyond the first year in the program, suspension averages declined substantially within the next one or two years, and typically continued to decline in subsequent years, through students' graduation years.

❖ However, the average number of suspensions among the comparison sample students was typically no higher, and in many cases was somewhat lower than the corresponding average for the students exposed to HW-SC. Thus, the declines in suspensions experienced by HW-SC participants were no greater than those that would have occurred without the program's intervention.

❖ On the other hand, it should be remembered that the comparison sample averages are to some extent artificially deflated by the fact that they reflect only the suspensions of the much smaller proportions of students who were still in school at each grade level (compared with the proportions of HW-SC students), so many of the comparison sample students who would be likely to have had higher levels of suspensions had previously dropped out of school. Factoring in an adjustment for that important variable, *the program may have had a limited positive impact in reducing the numbers of overall student suspensions.*

The program has had a very slight impact in reducing the total numbers of suspensions among its students, compared to similar students not exposed to the program.

Limited Program Impact on Number of Suspended Students

The data in Table 12 on the next page tell a similar story to the one in Table 11. The focus in the new table shifts to the actual numbers of students who were suspended at least once in each year, rather than the earlier table's focus on total number of suspensions. Just as in Table 11, the data on suspended students increased during the students' first year in the program, followed by a decline in subsequent years, with the greatest decline occurring between the middle and high school years.

Several observations are worth noting, based on the data in Table 12:

Table 12: Percentage of Students Remaining in School in Each Grade with At Least One Suspension During the Year, by Grade Cohort at Program Entry

Entry Grade/Sample	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Graduates
HW-SC Students								
7th Grade	28%	47%	49%	30%	27%	23%	---	--
8th Grade		35	68	33	25	20	12	14
9th Grade			34	35	24	27	18	20
10th Grade				33	33	40	22	13
Comparison Sample								
7th Grade	31	38	35	22	20	18	---	---
8th Grade		46	50	31	24	33	14	28
9th Grade			43	35	22	21	12	12
10th Grade				38	23	15	0	0

Note: Shaded grades represent the average number of suspensions for students the year prior to entering HW-SC (and their matched comparison sample students).
Except for the 7th-grade cohort, these data are based on only those cohorts which had reached their senior years (and their matched comparison sample students).

❖ The fact that about a third of the students admitted to the program had been suspended at least once in the year prior to their program entry suggests that the suspension variable is among the at-risk factors most frequently invoked in the decision to admit a student.

❖ As in the previous table, these data reflect the increase in suspensions during the first year in the program for most cohorts. Again, this may be at least in part a reflection of when the suspensions occurred during the year in which the student entered the program, but the reality is that, in both 7th-grade and 10th-grade

entering cohorts, the proportion of students with at least one suspension increased even in the second year after program entry, before declining significantly in subsequent years.

❖ About half of all middle school students in HW-SC were suspended, including two-thirds of those in the 8th-grade cohorts (the latter figure was heavily skewed by a single year, with much lower proportions in other years, but even after factoring that in, the overall proportions of 7th- and 8th-graders in the program who were suspended was close to 50%). *This suggests a need for a particular program focus to address related behavioral issues among middle school students.*

❖ *Even though there has been a significant drop in suspension rates over the years among students exposed to the program, the decline was no greater, and in some cases was not as great, as the change in suspension rates among comparison group students.* Even factoring in the fact that higher proportions of the probable suspension-prone students had already dropped out of the comparison sample, the fact remains that in most cohorts, the proportion of students exposed to HW-SC who were suspended was higher in most grades than among comparable students not exposed to the program who remained in school.

❖ Suspension data for the entire City School District, as reported by the State Education Department, indicate that middle school suspension rates in recent years have fluctuated between about 40% and 45% of all middle school students per year, and between about 20% and 30% of high school students. Those reported suspension rates include *only out-of-school suspensions.* The data reported in Table 12 suggest that *total* suspension rates for HW-SC middle school students have been higher than the District-wide rates, *but the Table 12 data include both in-school and out-of-school suspensions*, so the fact that the numbers are higher than District totals is presumably attributable to the "apples and oranges" comparison (breakdowns of the numbers of in-school vs. out-of-school comparisons were not available). At the high school level, HW-SC suspension rates appear to have typically been within the range of District-wide rates, even though the Table 12 data include all suspensions, rather than only out-of-school suspensions. Thus, *if it were possible to compare high school suspensions using identical definitions,*

Numbers of students suspended have not been reduced by program interventions.

it seems likely that HW-SC rates would be somewhat lower than the District-wide rates.

Total Days of Suspension Not Lower for HW-SC Students

As indicated below in Table 13, the average number of days of suspension per student remaining in school each year has followed the same basic pattern as reflected in the two previous tables in this chapter.

Table 13: Average Number of Days of Suspension for Students Remaining in School in Each Grade, by Grade Cohort at Program Entry

Entry Grade/Sample	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Gr. 10	Gr. 11	Gr. 12	Graduates
HW-SC Students								
7th Grade	1.7	3.4	4.3	2.6	4.0	1.0	---	---
8th Grade		1.9	2.8	2.0	0.8	2.2	0.8	0.9
9th Grade			2.1	2.2	1.2	1.6	1.0	0.7
10th Grade				0.7	1.1	1.7	1.6	0.5
Comparison Sample								
7th Grade	2.6	2.7	2.7	1.2	1.0	0.9	---	---
8th Grade		2.8	2.5	1.0	0.7	0.9	0.4*	0.6*
9th Grade			2.5	1.9	1.2	0.8	0.3	0.5
10th Grade				1.2	0.8	0.4	0.0	0.2

* Data based on fewer than 10 students still in school at that stage.
Note: Shaded grades represent the average number of days of suspension for students the year prior to entering HW-SC (and their matched comparison sample students).

As with the total number of suspensions, the numbers of days represented by those suspensions have also peaked during the middle school years, at an average of between three and four days per student per year, followed by an average of between one and

two days per student during the high school years. In most cases, HW-SC students averaged slightly more days on suspension than did their comparison group counterparts (typically a difference of about a day or less per student per year).

Differential Suspension Rates by Different Student Groups

Analyses of suspension patterns of students in HW-SC against various descriptive characteristics of the students revealed relatively few differences of significance between different subgroups. Average suspension profiles of different student subgroups were compared against each other, and against their matched similar students in the comparison sample.

Gender Differences

Although males in the program were somewhat more likely than females to have at least one suspension in any given year, there were no overall differences of significance in the average number of suspensions between boys and girls in the program. *The program appears to have had little impact on either boys or girls in reducing suspensions.*

Race/Ethnic Differences

HW-SC does not appear to have had any direct impact in reducing suspensions among African-American students, or among Hispanic students, who typically had the program's highest suspension rates of all racial/ethnic subgroups. (Numbers were too small to draw firm conclusions about other racial/ethnic subgroups.)

Poverty/Non-Poverty Differences

Poverty students in the program were more likely to be suspended, and to have more suspensions on the average, than were non-poverty students. As noted on other measures above, when contrasted with the comparison group students, the program appears to have had less impact in reducing suspensions among poverty students than among those not considered to be in poverty.

Differences by Pre-Program GPA Levels

Students who entered the program with grade point averages below 2.0 typically had higher suspension levels than did those with higher entering GPAs, and the program appears to have had no direct impact in reducing suspensions among such students, compared with their matched comparison group peers.

Conclusions

HW-SC has had no particular impact in reducing suspensions among its students. But this should not be held against HW-SC, since such reductions have never been among the stated goals of the program.

10. STUDENT TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

One of the most critical components of HW-SC is the opportunity provided for students to receive career-exploration guidance and job-readiness training, and to obtain part-time employment if certain criteria are met. After all, it is called the *Work*-Scholarship Connection for a good reason. In order to be eligible to obtain jobs with "employer partners"—employers who agree to work with HW-SC to hire eligible students and assign mentors to provide targeted support for the students—students must have at least a 2.0 grade point average and have been certified by program officials as having satisfactorily completed job-readiness training (discussed in more detail in Part Three below).

As noted in the student survey chapter that follows, the opportunity to obtain a job is one of the major reasons students agree to enter HW-SC. Job training was rated among the highest components of the program in terms of its helpfulness and value to the students. Yet actual job placement was rated somewhat lower, and in fact, internal program data discussed below document significant gaps between the numbers of students considered employable/eligible and the numbers actually obtaining jobs through the program.

In presenting data relevant to this issue, it should be noted that the job- and training-related reports currently generated by the program are not at this point designed to comprehensively answer several key questions related to the relationship between student training and employability, academic eligibility, career interests, actively seeking jobs, the specific impact of job acquisition and retention on academic achievement, etc. Furthermore, some of the program's tables break down numbers of students by grade and others by age, thereby making it difficult to link the two for purposes of determining proportions of students in one group organized by *grade* who do something else reflected in a different table organized by *age*. HW-SC, under the leadership of the Employment Development Specialist and the Database/Systems Analyst, is currently working to resolve these historical concerns, so that better tracking of student training, eligibility and job placement will be possible in the near future.

Even with the caveats about the current data, it is nonetheless possible to make a number of observations and draw some conclusions about the program's effectiveness in training students and helping them find jobs.

Students Eligible for Employment

Although the relevant internal HW-SC monthly tables are not compatible between grade and age of students, CGR made some rough assumptions about the age most students would be in a particular grade, and thereby estimated the proportions of students 14 and older who are considered by the program to be "eligible employable students." This criterion is based on age and academic standing (at least a 2.0 GPA). It apparently does not necessarily also include students who have been trained and certified as job ready, as many in this group may be, but not all, and some others may be job ready but not academically eligible. Nonetheless, definitional issues aside, review of monthly HW-SC reports from January through September of 2003 reveals that, among Rochester students, the proportion of "eligible employable students" has ranged from as low as about one-third of possible eligibles to a maximum of about 52%. Actual numbers of such students ranged from about 260 in the lowest month to a high of 380. The number and proportions have been higher from June through September than in the earlier months.[16]

> **Between a third and half of HW-SC students at any given time have met program eligibility criteria for obtaining a job through the program. Even fewer may also be certified as "job ready".**

These data suggest that at best about half, and as few as one-third of Rochester HW-SC students at any given time meet the program's eligibility criteria for obtaining a job. And the proportions who have in addition been certified as being "job ready" following training may be even lower, though data cannot confirm this either way at this point. The bottom line is that the pattern of academic performance (represented by GPAs) discussed earlier in Chapter 7 is clearly limiting the numbers of students who are considered employable by program standards.

Students Actually Employed

Even among those "eligible employable students," many are not actually employed. *Stated program outcomes or goals indicate that "70% of eligible participants will be employed" at any given time. Of the students 16 and older—those students who are most likely to be in demand by*

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[16] Although the evaluation focus was on Rochester students, it should be noted that during this same nine-month period, the Syracuse proportions of a significantly smaller number of participants who were considered employable ranged between a low of about 53% to highs of more than 80% since June.

Proportions of eligible HW-SC students actually employed have typically fallen short of program goals.

employers—the proportion of "eligible employable students" who are actually employed has ranged during 2003 from monthly highs of about two-thirds in the earlier months to about half since June.[17] The proportions would be lower if 15-year-olds were included, as relatively few of them have been employed through the program.

The actual numbers of employable students who had jobs increased during 2003, from monthly averages in the 80s earlier in the year to more than 100 in May, June and September (and more than 140 with summer jobs), but the *proportions* declined, as the numbers of students with jobs couldn't keep pace with the increases in the numbers of eligible students in recent months. It cannot be determined from the data how many of those without jobs were actively seeking job opportunities, vs. how many may have been eligible but not interested in a job at a particular time. Through September (excluding the two higher summer employment months), an average of 94 students per month were both "eligible employable" and actually employed, typically by "employer partners" offering mentoring support services—the types of employment promoted by the program. Given the implied promise and emphasis of the program on jobs, program officials are actively seeking ways to increase these numbers substantially in the future, and we discuss those efforts, and additional ways to expand the numbers of eligible and employed students, in Part Three of the report.

Students Obtaining Jobs Outside the Program

Beyond the numbers of students who obtain employment through the program—having proven their academic eligibility and having successfully completed job-readiness training—additional HW-SC students have managed to obtain jobs on their own, regardless of GPA or job-readiness training status. In an average month in 2003, about 63 additional students found jobs on their own, over and above the average of 94 who were placed through the program. In such cases, the program should attempt to develop a relationship between the Youth Advocate and the student's supervisor or other appropriate representative of the employer. However, there are no guarantees that such a relationship will

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[17] Syracuse proportions were typically lower: around 35% in most months since April. Thus, even though higher proportions of Syracuse students have met eligibility requirements for employment, smaller proportions of those students (compared with Rochester) have actually obtained jobs.

occur, and the likelihood of a formal, or even informal mentoring relationship occurring, such as is expected to occur with the employer partners, is much smaller. In addition, *when jobs are generated by students outside the program, HW-SC is less likely to be able to develop and maintain the relationship between the job as an incentive and the need to focus on academic performance.*

Small Proportions of Students with Jobs

Adding together both the jobs obtained through the program for "eligible employable students" and those obtained by program students on their own, the number of Rochester students with jobs in the first nine months in 2003 ranged between 146 and 165, with an average of 157, exclusive of peak summer employment. This represents between 15% and 20% of the total Rochester student enrollment in the program each month. Even removing 7th- and 8th-graders, and including only the older students who are most likely to obtain jobs, *the proportion of high school students in the program with any type of job has typically averaged about 25% per month during 2003. That is, about three-quarters of high school students in the program are not employed at any given time.*

> **An average of about a quarter of all high school students in the program each month have had jobs in the past year.**

So it is likely that GPAs across the program are down in part because of insufficient jobs in general to act as incentives, and the lack of program-generated jobs with mentors in particular to provide needed supports for students. And, of course, *the reverse is also likely to be true: that job placements are lower than they could be if GPAs were higher.* Chicken and egg are both alive and well in this equation, and *both job and academic performance issues need to be addressed simultaneously for both academic and employment goals to be met in the future.*

> **At the same time, there are both insufficient students eligible for jobs, and insufficient jobs with mentors, to meet demands.**

In most months, about half of the total number of Rochester jobs are typically provided by Wegmans. In addition, seven other "employer partners" have committed to the program, and about 40 other Rochester area employers have provided one or more jobs for HW-SC students.

Terminations from Jobs

Job termination rates reported by the program have been relatively low. Not including summer job terminations, terminations from jobs by Rochester area students have averaged only about 2.5 per month in 2003, assuming accurate program records. As the largest employer of HW-SC students, Wegmans officials confirmed the relatively small number of terminations, and compared the turnover rates among HW-SC students to those of other urban

employees who have not been trained or supported by the program. Although different officials offered slightly different estimates that could not be independently verified by CGR—and actual data were available for only limited periods of time—all were fairly consistent in suggesting that turnover among HW-SC students typically ranged between 15% and 20% per year, compared to 85% to 100% among all other urban student employees. Data on reasons for terminations were typically not very precise, but the majority were for unspecified personal reasons (which would include academic reasons), or for issues of non-compliance/job performance reasons. The program is working to develop more precise documentation of reasons, as a management tool to help anticipate problems and provide training or other supports to reduce the extent of terminations in the future.

Relationship between Mentors and Terminations

Even among employee partners which have committed to providing mentors, 35% of HW-SC students with jobs with those employers did not have mentors at one point in time in the past year or so.

Incomplete data, but data which involve about 85 employed HW-SC students, suggest the important relationship between the provision of mentors and job terminations. *At one point in time, of 85 HW-SC students hired by employer partners which commit to providing mentors, 35% of the students did not have assigned mentors.* This may have been a temporary situation, and regular supervisors may have been able to play at least a portion of that role in the absence of formal mentors, but the reality is that the promise, at least implicit, of formal mentoring was absent for a significant number of these students. Moreover, an examination of termination data over a two-year period, also for employer partners, indicated that of 66 job terminations of HW-SC students during 2001 and 2002, 29% had not had mentors assigned to them.

Future Data Monitoring Needs

In order to track students more effectively and determine the characteristics that distinguish between the most successful and less successful job placements in the future, the program needs to have, and is beginning to move toward, the ability to more accurately determine, monitor and analyze the integrated effects of reasons for terminations from jobs, the lengths of stay in employment situations, existence or absence of mentors, presence or absence of job-readiness training prior to obtaining the job, meeting initial and ongoing maintenance of academic standards (at least a 2.0 GPA), job type, student career interest, and whether the

job was generated by the program or obtained by the individual student.

The related issues of the number of jobs, the potential and need for growth in number of jobs in the future, and the two-way relationship between number of jobs and eligible students are discussed in more detail in Part Three of the report.

11. STUDENT SURVEY FINDINGS

The final quantitative chapter of the report summarizes findings from a survey of Rochester HW-SC students conducted near the end of the 2002-03 school year. The survey was designed by CGR and was distributed to students through their Youth Advocates. In order to ensure the confidentiality of responses, no names or identification numbers were included or asked for on the survey form, and students were encouraged to return their completed surveys in sealed envelopes provided to them.

After discussions with Youth Advocates and HW-SC administration officials, it was decided not to attempt to develop a sampling approach to the survey, but rather to simply have Advocates distribute the survey to as many students as possible, and encourage them to take the time to respond, in order to provide feedback that would help improve the program in the future. Thus we make no claim that the information obtained from the survey is representative of the full range of students in the program. Indeed, it is reasonable to conclude that the survey was most likely to have been completed by the students most actively involved in the program, or at least those most regularly in contact with their Youth Advocates. Students who are less involved and who have less frequent contact with their Advocates were probably less likely to have completed the survey. As such, it seems reasonable to assume that the survey results may be somewhat more positive overall than would have been the case if all HW-SC students, or a random survey of all students, had been surveyed.

Nonetheless, despite the caveats, substantial numbers of students responded, and the demographic characteristics of those responding were quite similar to the overall profile of students in the program. At the time the survey was implemented, in early June, program data suggests that there were about 975 active HW-SC students in the Rochester component of the program. Of those, the survey was completed by 421 students—about 43% of all active Rochester students. Moreover, the survey responses accurately reflected the gender and racial/ethnic profile of the program. For example, 62% of the surveys were completed by

females, compared to a similar proportion of females currently in the program, based on our database through the middle of the year. Similarly, 71% of the surveys were completed by African-American students, 16% by Hispanics, 5% by Caucasians, and about 8% by "Others". Each of those proportions was within two or three percentage points of the corresponding proportions of all students in the program. Students from all grades and with varying lengths of time in the program were well represented, and HW-SC students from 10 of the 13 middle and high schools in the city completed surveys. Detailed findings from the survey are available upon request to CGR. The major findings are summarized below.

Reasons for Joining HW-SC

About 13% of the survey respondents had been in the program for less than six months, 18% for 6-12 months, 45% for between one and two years, and 25% had been participants for more than two years. When asked why they had joined the voluntary program, students gave a variety of responses (multiple responses were permitted), including:

- 25% said because of a recommendation from a friend;

- 25% because of a teacher recommendation;

- 16% because of a recommendation from a parent;

- 25% because they were contacted by a Youth Advocate;

- 31% "heard about it and were interested";

- 28% said because they wanted to get a job;

- 16.5% "wanted to participate in program-related activities".

The data suggest that the "word of mouth" about the program works well, with recommendations coming from a variety of sources and from Youth Advocate networking, and with a variety of student motivations and interests in specific aspects of the program affecting student decisions to "sign on."

Once in the program, *about 80% of all students said they met with thier Youth Advocate at least weekly*: nearly half (45.5%) said they met

Extent of Satisfaction with HW-SC

daily, and another 34% said weekly. Typically at least weekly should be the norm for student/YA meetings, but 13% said they met every other week, 4% said they met monthly, and 4% said "a few times a year." *Thus about one-fifth of the students indicated that they met with their Advocate less frequently than suggested by program standards.*

When asked how satisfied they were with the program, nearly all students were very supportive: 90% said they were either satisfied or very satisfied (52% the latter), and 90% also said that the program was helpful or very helpful (53% the latter).

Within the context of their overall view that the program had been helpful to them, students were asked more specifically how helpful various aspects of program services had been. Listed below are the possible responses, in the order of the proportions who said the services were either helpful or very helpful:

- Meeting with the Youth Advocate — 92%

- Enrichment sessions — 79%

- Job training — 79%

- Career exploration — 76%

- College preparation — 68%

- Tutoring — 67%

- Job placement — 65%

- Community service — 62%

Relatively few students indicated that services were "not helpful," but there were some exceptions. Even though the majority found the services helpful, significant minorities of the students found the following services "not helpful" (the lowest level on the rating scale): community service (16%), job placement (16%), college preparation (11%), and tutoring (10%). We were not able to determine whether students found these services not helpful after actual exposure to the services which they found unsatisfactory, or because they had not had any experience with the services (though other students simply did not respond to some of these questions,

suggesting that they had not been exposed to them). Several of these findings will be referenced again in the context of subsequent discussions in Part Three of the report about specific components of the program.

Students were also asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the program and its value. The following list summarizes in order the degree of support for the various statements, based on the percentage who either agreed or strongly agreed:

- My Youth Advocate is helpful to me   91%

- I would recommend this program to a friend   90%

- My YA works with my school to help me succeed   86%

- This program has helped me plan for my future   85%

- I'm better prepared for a job bec. of the program   81%

- I know what I'd like to be doing in 10 years   80%

- My YA knows the challenges/successes in my life   79%

- I'm more likely to finish school bec. of HW-SC   79%

- I'm more likely to go to college bec. of HW-SC   78%

- The program has done all it promised to do   78%

- Joining HW-SC has improved school performance   76%

- Enrichment sessions are useful   75%

- I've developed better work/study habits in HW-SC   75%

- HW-SC has helped me get academic help I need   75%

- My Youth Advocate knows my family   72%

- My YA stays in contact with my teachers   62%

The program consistently received strong support on a variety of issues from three-quarters or more of the students who completed the survey (and in almost every issue, no more than 3% or 4% of the students said they "strongly disagreed"). *The Youth Advocates are clearly viewed as an integral part of the program's success, through the support that most students view them as having provided.* Most of the students clearly attribute personal growth and enhanced future prospects in their lives to the impact of the program. How realistic some of those assessments are—in light of some of the findings reported earlier, particularly those related to graduation rates, academic performance issues, and the numbers of students not being placed in jobs—is perhaps a legitimate question to raise. And it may be telling that the one area that students were least certain about is the extent to which the Youth Advocates are perceived as staying in contact with their teachers.

Nonetheless, the sense that students appear to have that the program has helped them, and that it has provided supports that seem to have helped provide them with a sense of optimism in lives where that might otherwise be in short supply, is not to be minimized. Providing a different perspective on life, and a sense of possibilities that might not otherwise even be considered by many of those students, can be a significant role for a program to play. But HW-SC must also be able to back up that promise, and make sure that the enhanced sense of possibilities can indeed be fulfilled by most students in the program. Clearly that seems to be happening for many students in the program, but many continue to fall short, as seen in earlier chapters. *The challenge of the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection is to find ways to build on its strengths to help even more of its students fulfill these promises in the future.* The next portion of the report addresses a number of programmatic issues and services and ways of beginning to strengthen them so that even higher proportions of HW-SC students can successfully meet their goals in the future.

> **Most students attributed enhanced prospects to the impact of the program, although how realistic those perceptions were is uncertain.**

> **Students expressed a strong sense of receiving needed support and a sense of hope and optimism from the program.**

PART THREE: HOW STUDENTS ARE SERVED

Parts Three and Four of the report are based on the findings from the qualitative components of our evaluation, integrated with the implications of the quantitative analyses presented in Part Two.

CGR undertook its qualitative evaluation by way of reviewing Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection publications and internal documents, and conducted detailed one-on-one interviews and group discussions with Hillside and HW-SC administrative, management, and program staff; HW-SC board chair; HW-SC students at both the middle and high school levels; parents of program students; representatives of employer partners; and staff in the Rochester City Schools where HW-SC students attend.

The interview and discussion protocols varied to some extent across these groups, yet core questions were consistently designed to address such topics as the following: understanding of the core components and services of the program; perceived program strengths; challenges facing the program; perceptions of factors that contribute to HW-SC successes and concerns; identification of needs for new or modified program services; and any specific suggestions of ways to strengthen the program for the future. The information gathered through these discussions has helped shape CGR's recommendations at the end of the report for continuous program improvement.

Based on what we learned in these discussions, we have broken our presentation of the findings and implications into two overall broad topics, which are summarized in Parts Three and Four of the report. This Part focuses on issues related to "Students and How They are Served," with a number of chapters devoted to specific topics related to student services provided by the program. Part Four will address "Internal Structures and Procedures."

Throughout both Parts Three and Four, we address issues in the context of how faithful the program in its current configuration is to the basic model design—i.e., the degree of fidelity between the model as designed and as actually being implemented.

12. STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS

Students enroll in the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection on a voluntary basis, most often in the seventh or eighth grade. As noted in Chapter 4, since the beginning of the 2000-01 school year, almost two-thirds (63%) of all new admissions to the program have entered in the 7th or 8th grades. In addition, about 20% of the new entrants during that time have joined the program during their 9th- grade year, with smaller numbers entering in 10th grade (except for a large number of 10th-graders entering in 2002-03).

Criteria and Target Population

As the program has expanded in recent years, it has admitted higher proportions of students to the program with lower GPAs—in part by design, in part by exceptions over time. By design, in 1998-99, the program admission criteria were broadened. Prior to that year, only students with pre-program GPAs between 2.5 and 2.99 were considered eligible for admission. Since the beginning of the '98-99 year, students have been eligible to participate in the program if their pre-program GPA falls between 2.0 and 2.99 and they demonstrate at least one of five "school based" (i.e., defined by the City School District) risk factors that put them in danger of ongoing academic difficulties. These risk factors include the following: age (student is behind a grade level for his/her age); attendance at a rate lower than district standards; 50% E's in core subjects; two or more in- or out-of-school suspensions; and performance on New York State standardized tests at below-grade level. *Although the criteria for admission are firmly stated, only about 60% of all admissions in recent years have fallen within these GPA eligibility restrictions.*

HW-SC has made exceptions to its core stated eligibility criteria in about 40% of all program admissions.

The program has made exceptions to the GPA restriction in about 40% of all recent program admissions. Students with GPAs below or above the 2.0-2.99 range can be admitted to the HW-SC under either of two sets of alternate circumstances: either they must demonstrate three of the five risk factors noted above, or they must be a sibling of a student previously admitted to the program under the standard eligibility criteria. Siblings are automatically admitted, if they are interested, regardless of their GPA. However, of the 446 admissions since 1996-97 in our database who had pre-

program GPAs outside the 2.0-2.99 range, only 80 (18%) were siblings. Thus, the vast majority of "non-eligible" admissions are students presumably deemed to have three or more of the CSD risk factors. Or, CGR was told that in special cases, when, for example, a student is close to the required GPA range and has additional "non-school based" risk factors,[18] Managers may allow Youth Advocates to admit such students into the program. Advocates indicated that the willingness to be flexible on admissions criteria varies from Manager to Manager and from case to case, and may be influenced in some instances by the desire to maintain full YA caseloads (typically 30 students per YA).

In the past three or four years, when making exceptions to the program's GPA eligibility criteria, HW-SC has been more likely to select students below the criterion range than above it. As noted in the analyses in Part Two, the outcomes are very different for the two groups, *so as the program has expanded, the practical effect has been that more students have entered at the lower end of the academic performance spectrum, and they have not performed as well within the program as those who entered with higher initial GPAs.*

Data aside, Youth Advocates characterized the students they are attempting to focus on in the program as "not bad kids, but those who need academic and additional supports to overcome various problems in their lives," or, as one put it, "middle of the road kids who need help and aren't likely to succeed without it."   Most added that even though they do not specifically target boys or girls, it is often harder to entice boys into the program (as reflected by the fact that more than 60% of the admissions have been girls).

Ideal Pre-Program GPA Range?

Advocates, and some of the Managers, were split in our discussions concerning what types of students should be targeted by the program. Many were comfortable with the criteria as they currently exist, and with the ability to be flexible enough to make exceptions and accept students outside the standard criteria. Others believe that it would be better to go back to the old criteria of only accepting students with GPAs of 2.5 or higher, and that

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[18] Such risk factors include single-parent families, heads of households who have dropped out of school, family income below the poverty line, families receiving public assistance,   pregnant or parenting teen, criminal/juvenile delinquency history, foster care home, substance abuse (student and/or family), etc.

the program should be especially cautious about accepting students with GPAs lower than 2.0. As one Manager noted, "2.0 may be too low, as too often those students start there and then regress, so maybe we should go back to 2.4 or 2.5 to provide a bit more breathing room."

A few of those interviewed noted the perceptions that they had heard that the program is overly selective, "creams the top level of students," and does not take enough risks. *But most suggested that it was difficult to conclude that the program was in any way "creaming or elitist when most of the students are receiving free lunch, and all have one or more risk factors that work against being successful in school."* Others suggested that to select students with GPAs any lower than are currently being accepted would be unrealistic, would guarantee high levels of failure (as suggested by the data in Part Two of the report), and would limit the program's ability to work with those with whom the program has a reasonable chance to help succeed.

To the extent that there was anything approaching consensus among program staff, it was that it can often be difficult, and "feel like swimming upstream," to be dealing with large numbers of students who are right on the margin academically. Some concluded that the solution should be to revert to selecting only students with 2.5 GPAs or higher, but *the majority seemed most comfortable with the current mix of students, but with a conscious effort to continue to seek out as many as possible in the 2.5 and higher ranges with some leadership potential,* "so there is a reasonable balance and so they can help create role models for the other kids in the program."

The other strong conclusion expressed by most of those interviewed was that as long as the program continues to accept significant numbers of students near or below the 2.0 GPA level, it needs to find ways to strengthen the "amount and intensity of the academic supports we make available through the program if we have any chance to improve the academic performance and retention of most of these kids."

HW-SC staff are currently uncertain about future program admission criteria.

Referral Sources

Advocates recruit their students through a variety of different means, which vary from school to school, often because of the expectations, and in some instances, requirements, of the specific CSD building administration. In one or two schools, Advocates are given lists by building administrators and are told that these students are the ones who have been identified for participation in

HW-SC. In other cases, schools provide little or no direct support in the recruiting process, leaving it up to YAs to actively recruit students for the program. In some schools, relationships between the YAs and individual teachers yield referrals of some students. Overall, YAs in general estimated that between 10% and 20% of all new recruits to the program come from direct teacher or school administrator referrals. This estimate is slightly lower than the proportion of teacher referrals indicated by the students themselves: 25% of the students surveyed indicated they were referred to the program by teachers. Some Advocates indicated that they preferred the flexibility to recruit students on their own, without being limited to school referrals. *Ideally, there would be a greater mix than currently seems to occur in most schools, with YA recruitment supplemented by more frequent referrals from teachers who are knowledgeable about the program and how it can help their students* (see further discussion of program-school relationships in Part Four).

Frequently, Advocates have no need to recruit students into the program. This is particularly true at the high school level, when most program slots are typically filled with students already in the program who move up from the middle school level. However, as some YAs suggested, they may be inheriting a group of students who were comfortable with their middle school situation and their YA at that level, and are not eager to make the change. The practical results of this transition were seen earlier in the declines in retention and GPAs between middle and high school levels. (The implications of this transition and what can be done about it, and how this issue may be affected by the shift within the CSD to a 7-12 grade configuration, will be discussed in more detail in Part Four.)

Most Advocates reported maintaining "waiting lists" of students with whom they have cultivated some level of relationship. These students are those that the YAs monitor, stay informally in contact with, and attempt to draw from as new program recruits to replace graduates, students moving from middle to high school, or students who terminate from the program prior to graduation.

There is considerable variation in ways students are recruited and referred to the program.

Agreements

Students enter HW-SC and agree to abide by program regulations including attendance at enrichments, participation in mandatory tutoring when grades fall below a 2.0, and participation in

community service. Upon program intake, Youth Advocates complete a number of forms, including a basic application form, student interview form, and Intervention Service Strategy (ISS) Form. Ultimately, the enrollment process results in a visit to the student's parent or guardian, and a signed Student and Parent Contract that outlines the responsibilities and commitments of each as long as the student remains in the program.

Conclusions

HW-SC currently deviates considerably from its core model of admitting people into the program: 40% of admissions over the past several years have been outside the stated criteria. In part because of rapid program expansion, in part because of differing pressures to recruit due to differing levels of student terminations and graduations, and in part due to differences in referral and recruiting practices from school to school, the approaches to bringing students into the program vary from YA to YA, from Manager to Manager, and from school to school. There is no clear consensus as to whom the program should be targeting its approach, including how it should deal with students with pre-program grade point averages of 3.0 or higher, or below 2.0, and how it should deal consistently with siblings.

13. ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Magnitude of the Problem

As emphasized throughout this report, high proportions of students in the program each year have significant academic performance problems. Grade point averages decline from year to year, particularly as students go from middle school to high school. Even many of the students who stay in school, on course to graduate, have averages significantly below the 2.0 level that is ostensibly required for students to be admitted to the program initially, and that is required for students to obtain jobs through the program. *The more optimistic Youth Advocates estimated that at least 40-50% of their students needed tutoring support beyond what they are now receiving,* and most indicated that most of their students would need summer school classes as well. Other YAs were less sanguine, estimating that closer to 75-80% of their students need academic help beyond what they receive now. Students in the program who took SAT preparation courses and tests last spring performed "abysmally," according to one person, with others using similar adjectives to describe the poor collective performance.

Mandatory Tutoring: Is There Enough?

According to program policy, students whose grade point average dips below a 2.0 or who fail half of their core courses must attend mandatory tutoring sessions. And yet, relatively few students are perceived to get the full academic support they need. One Advocate put it bluntly: "Maybe 5% get real tutoring of benefit, but 80% need such support." Youth Advocates consistently expressed concern both about the extent to which their students need tutoring, as well as about the difficulties they have in securing needed assistance on a consistent, sufficiently-frequent basis. Several Advocates and Managers specifically emphasized that "Academics is the key to the success of the program and to keeping kids in school and in jobs; it affects everything we do." Yet most went on to make the point that, *in their view, not enough focus is placed on strengthening students' academic performance—most viewed the problem as a lack of sufficient program resources able to be devoted to providing consistent tutoring services.* Numerous examples of inconsistent, insufficient resources available to meet the needs were repeated over and over in virtually every discussion we had with all levels of program staff.

Although Advocates record the need for tutoring in Individual Development Plans for students, and indicate whether tutoring is being provided, there appears to be no way that the program currently tracks and monitors consistently across all students the proportion of students receiving tutoring, the nature and extent of the services provided, and the precise extent of perceived gaps in tutoring services.

Examples of Tutoring Services

Various tutoring approaches have been used, with varying degrees of success in the program, including:

- Homework Academies and other after-school homework assistance/tutoring efforts at each school. These are typically viewed as being too ineffectual, and not providing the type of individualized or "very small group assistance" most feel is needed to be successful.

- Several Advocates noted the fact that the program has at times had access to a "program tutor" who was able to rotate from school to school to provide services to program students. However, they described a period of time during which one tutor went from school to school over a three-month period, once a week, for an hour and a half at a time. While this represented a consistent commitment of time by a person providing dedicated time to HW-SC students, this was viewed as insufficient and too infrequent ("it's not enough—just a teaser") to make a difference for most students who, in the view of YAs, need much more extensive and frequent tutoring support than could be provided under this type of arrangement.

- Teachers of HW-SC students sometimes agree to work with individual students as needed, but *not all YAs have developed the needed level of relationships with teachers, or the willingness to go to them to ask how they can work together to help a student, for this approach to be prevalent*, even though developing such relationships is a key component of the supports YAs are expected to provide.

- YAs themselves often provide tutoring assistance, or at least homework assistance, especially if a student's needs coincide with a YA's academic strengths and interests. *Most*

YAs indicated that they did not believe tutoring was their job, as most are not trained to provide such services, but several said they tried to provide tutoring support where possible to fill some of the void in tutoring options, "since the program and its students are suffering without enough tutoring resources on a regular basis." Some comments suggested that even if a teacher is willing to help a student, the student may prefer to work with the Advocate or a different tutor, "because students sometimes perceive the teacher to be the problem in the first place."

- Rochester Institute of Technology students have developed a special tutoring project in which HW-SC students come to campus one evening a week for tutoring and to have the opportunity to spend some time in a college setting. Other tutoring resources have been developed at other local colleges. But all are perceived to be too infrequent, too unfocused, and too inconsistent to have much real academic value.

The RIT tutoring program is often cited as a positive example of a good partnership between the program and a local post-secondary institution which can not only have academic benefits, but can also help plant seeds of interest among HW-SC students concerning college life. But whatever value it may have for some students in exposing them to a small slice of campus life, most Advocates whose students have experienced the program shared their frustrations with "the well-meaning but probably not very effective effort." As described by the YAs, sometimes tutors knew their material but were not effective at communicating with the students. As a volunteer program, there was not always consistency from week to week in which specific RIT students would show up to tutor. Moreover, HW-SC students needed transportation to RIT, which their Advocates would provide, but there were limits to how many students could be transported, and often the number of volunteer tutors was not sufficient to provide needed attention to the HW-SC students who could attend. Numbers of volunteer tutors, and their academic skills and interests, varied from week to week, and often did not effectively match the needs and numbers of HW-SC students. No one has done an assessment of what impact the tutoring program has had

on the grades of the students who used it, but most HW-SC staff familiar with the program characterized it as well-meaning and a "nice idea in concept," but as lacking consistency and having little if any real impact on the students.

Student Perspectives on Tutoring

When program participants were asked in focus groups what they would tell friends who were interested in joining HW-SC, a few said that their grades had improved as a result of participation. For example, one young woman told us, "When I joined the program, my GPA was a 2.5. Now, my GPA is a 3.75. And I know it's because of the program. My Advocate makes sure that I stay on track." Several participants reported that their Advocates are very aware of their progress in school. One young woman explained, "My Advocate is always in my face and in my business. But if he weren't, I might not be doing as well." While this was a theme repeated frequently in our discussions with both students and parents, it must also be noted that, given the low GPA levels reported earlier for large numbers of students in the program, these anecdotal success stories, while undeniable and often inspiring, do not appear to be the norm across the program, given its current level of resources devoted to academic supports.

> **Students were only moderately positive about the value of tutoring within the program.**

Beyond focus group discussions, in our more extensive written survey of students in the program, students overall indicated that tutoring through the program had been modestly helpful, but *tutoring support overall was among the lowest rated of the program services.* Students indicated that when they needed help, it was most effective when they got it either from their own teachers, in the form of special tutoring, or from their Advocates, in the form of extra help with homework. A number of the students maintained that Youth Advocates are a better source of academic support than are teachers. In the words of one Work-Scholarship participant, "It's better to go to your Advocate than to your teacher 'cause the teacher's the one who confused you to begin with."

Parental Perspectives

Most parents in our two parent focus groups felt that students who needed extra help in the form of academic tutoring did not typically have timely access to the services they needed, though they expressed appreciation for program efforts to provide such support. Parents indicated that they believe the schools are

responsible for providing extra help when students need it, and that often schools wait too long to give struggling students extra help. If tutoring is unavailable, parents feel that the school, not the Advocates or the HW-SC, is responsible.

Staff Suggestions for Strengthening Academic Supports

A number of suggestions were made during our interviews and focus group discussions concerning what the HW-SC should do to strengthen the level of academic support for its students. Some of the suggestions were in direct conflict with each other, and some could more easily be implemented than others. Some would take significant expansion and targeting of financial resources to implement. At this point, they are simply presented without comment as a summary of the types of suggestions voiced in our discussions. Later, in the final chapter of the report, CGR offers its own suggestions concerning actions that should be considered by the program and funders in the future. In the meantime, the *suggestions made by the various stakeholders with whom we spoke are summarized below, in no particular order of significance*:

❖ YAs should be taking responsibility more aggressively for working with individual teachers to get them to provide more extensive tutoring after school with particular students, either one-on-one or in small groups with individualized attention.

❖ The program needs to have access to groups of teachers or tutors, or perhaps retired teachers or other volunteers, who are dedicated to working exclusively with HW-SC students on either a volunteer or contractual basis. HW-SC needs adequate program resources devoted to procuring such academic supports.

❖ The program in the future needs more tutors before it needs more YAs or more students.

❖ Maybe we could develop tutoring relationships with particular churches to come in with volunteers and work with our students on a regular basis, like some do with students in specific schools in the city.

❖ The City School District and HW-SC need to develop a partnership in which the District designates more resources and certified teachers to work more intensively with HW-SC students. We need to provide incentives for more teachers to provide additional support.

- ❖ We should develop a tutoring center at Hart Street, where students would come one or more times a week to get help.

- ❖ There need to be designated tutors to work with HW-SC students at each school for at least two days a week, so services can be easily accessible and frequent enough to help make a difference.

- ❖ Whether we use paid teachers, retired teachers, student volunteers or other volunteer tutors, we need to have the same persons working with the same students on an ongoing basis to develop relationships and to provide consistency in coverage of materials from session to session, building on what has been covered in the past, instead of starting over each time with new people.

- ❖ Maybe some of our own students who are doing well academically could be encouraged to provide tutoring services to other program students who need help. Maybe older students could tutor some of the middle school students. We'd have to be careful not to add to their own burdens by overloading them with new responsibilities, but some of the students might like the opportunity, and they could act as role models, and maybe we could set it up so they'd get community service credit for doing this. It could also look good on college applications.

- ❖ The program should consider creating an Academic Advisor position to work with Advocates and teachers to help find ways to improve academic performance, to set up tutoring arrangements, and to work with students to help improve study skills, test-taking skills, preparing for SATs, etc.

- ❖ HW-SC should not become a replacement for the CSD. It is not our job to educate the students, and we shouldn't be attempting to usurp their teaching role. It is our job to motivate students and get them to class, but it is up to the District to be responsible for educating them once we get them there. We shouldn't be setting up a separate internal education system within the program.

- ❖ We need to develop some type of Academic Center within the program, in conjunction with the CSD, in which they provide a pool of teachers to come to the program to work extensively with our students. We need to provide assistance with homework and provide basic tutoring support, but we also need to provide extensive remedial education for some students, especially in math and English/reading. We should get 8 to 10 teachers from the

District assigned to work with our students to provide the supports they need to succeed academically.

❖ We need to get to our students "early and often" to strengthen their academic skills if we are going to do a better job of increasing our graduation rates and the numbers of students going on to 4-year colleges and universities. Simple homework assistance and part-time tutoring aren't enough.

❖ We should consider having an educational testing component in the program, so we can diagnose our students' needs more effectively, and get them the supplemental supports they need to address those needs.

❖ Wherever possible, the program needs to find ways to engage more parents in providing attention and support for their students to help them focus on improving their academic performance.

❖ I hate to add more requirements for collecting data, but I think we already collect it, and just need a better way to centralize information on records of who uses tutors, and who needs tutors for what types of courses, so we can more effectively monitor where our needs are for the future.

Conclusions

The model as it has developed has not been completely faithful to the original plan. The model proposed an assurance, in effect, of the availability of tutoring for students failing courses and/or with GPAs below 2.0. The reality is that the promised tutoring has been inconsistent in delivery: it has not always been available, and when it is, it has varied widely in its nature and quality and frequency. Provision of academic preparation for college has not always been consistent. The degree of teacher and YA collaboration in developing academic supports for students varies widely. In order to address the needs of increasing numbers of students for academic supports, the program in the future will need more consistently effective approaches to assure that the supports promised by the model will be consistently available for all students needing them.

14. STUDENT ENRICHMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Student enrichments are a stated requirement of program participation for students, and one of the chief components of the Youth Advocate's job descriptions. Advocates are expected to hold at least one enrichment session each week (or a total of 30 or more during the school year). A minimum of 60% of the Advocate's caseload (typically 18 students) is expected to attend each non-academic enrichment session, which must be a group activity. Advocates are expected to submit explanations for students who are not in attendance, and to provide one-on-one summaries of sessions wherever possible for those who miss the group sessions. Community service activities, on the other hand, are rarely referenced within the program.

Curriculum: What is Covered in the Enrichment Sessions

Although there is considerable flexibility as to what is covered in the enrichment sessions, there is a Career Planning and Placement outline that serves as at least a broad guide to the topics to be covered, with suggestions for which specific topics should be emphasized or mandatory at particular grade levels. The suggested topics fall within five broad areas:

- Academic (e.g., homework skills, study skills, note-taking skills, tutorial services, etc.);

- College Preparation (e.g., college visits, application processes, financial aid seminars, SAT preparation, etc.);

- Social and Life Skills (e.g., conflict resolution, sexuality awareness, stress management, self-esteem, time management, good hygiene, drug awareness, etc.);

- Career Exploration (e.g., career interest survey, job shadowing, job search strategies, career research project, etc.);

- School-to-Work (e.g., job-readiness training, customer service skills, effective communication, resume writing, relations with employers and employees, etc.).

Consistency of Enrichment Presentations

At this point, there is relatively little consistency across Youth Advocates in how and when, and by whom, the various enrichment activities and topics are presented. In part this is by design, as there is a conscious desire on the part of the program to encourage YAs to develop approaches tailored to their understanding of the particular needs of their students. But there are also a number of people within HW-SC who believe that it would be more helpful to have greater consistency of presentations across the program. The Career Planning and Placement outline of overall approaches to the provision of enrichment topics is one response to that desire, and there is a conscious effort to create a more formal approach to the series of job-readiness training (JRT) sessions (discussed in more detail in the following chapter).

Youth Advocates are encouraged to use community resources, ranging from other not-for-profits to those connections they may have developed over time, to create and present enrichment curricula. Often, several Advocates at one school will work together to develop a program that is then offered collectively to all the students they serve. Nonetheless, the core responsibilities for scheduling, developing and presenting the contents of the enrichment sessions remain primarily with the individual YAs. Most have created a number of sessions and presentations on their own, in addition to those developed and presented jointly by YAs within particular schools. *For the most part, it is the YAs who primarily set the standards and expectations for at least the non-JRT enrichment sessions. Up to this point, other than overall outlines of approaches, there have been few overall formal guidelines developed by the program concerning either content, sequencing, or suggested presenters of the sessions.*

> **There is little consistent approach to the provision of enrichment sessions across the program at this time.**

Some YAs and Managers spoke in favor of maintaining such flexibility, arguing that the YAs know best what is most important to cover, and in what fashion, with their students. Others argued that it is inefficient to have several YAs separately developing materials for the same basic topics, and that at the least there needs to be a more comprehensive manual or clearinghouse of information to enable different approaches to be shared across YAs, to prevent constant "reinvention of the wheel." Other YAs and Managers suggested that there would be value to having a consistent curriculum or set of core content within each topic area, so that all students are exposed to consistent materials, regardless

of their school and YA. Under that scenario, individual YAs could make adjustments to tailor the information as needed to their students, but the core materials would be presented to all students.

Several of those with whom we spoke also suggested that the program should develop a list of "outside" community resources with skills, knowledge and experience in various topic areas, along with any assessments by YAs who may have used such resources in the past in presentations to their students. Resource people or organizations deemed to be particularly effective in presenting and leading group discussions around particular topics should at least be considered as part of the core enrichment session curriculum/ content in the future, as a way of further ensuring that consistent, tested messages be conveyed to all students within the program.

Several of those with whom we spoke during our interviews noted the fact that in the future, it would be helpful not only for YAs to have a more formal written manual or set of guidelines and background information concerning enrichment materials, but that it would also be helpful to have more extensive training early on concerning the value and content of the enrichment sessions, their importance to the program, resources to use, incentives to offer students to entice attendance at the sessions, etc.

Attendance and Perceived Value

Almost 80% of the students surveyed indicated that enrichment sessions were helpful or very helpful, and the majority of students in focus groups reported having learned from time spent in those sessions. The Youth Advocates reported, however, that they sometimes feel that students attend primarily because of the food that is served. Moreover, while students who attend enrichments record their attendance on a sign-in sheet, the mandatory attendance policy is rarely enforced. When students were told that enrichment attendance was mandatory, they told us of friends who never attend the sessions. Similarly, Advocates explained that they worked with some students who were simply unable to participate in the sessions, either because they worked, babysat younger siblings, or participated in after-school sports.

Advocates are expected to inform parents/guardians about upcoming enrichment sessions, to make reminder phone calls to students, and even to establish incentives to increase attendance at enrichment sessions.

Although attendance records are kept by the YAs, many of those interviewed suggested that they see little evidence that they are used consistently for monitoring or management/accountability purposes. YAs estimated that enrichment session attendance is often high at the middle school level, and that it may be as high as 90% for some sessions among freshmen, especially during sessions where job-readiness training is the focus. For other sessions, however, particularly among older students, the attendance is likely to fall off considerably. Although attendance varies, what we heard most frequently suggests that "attendance of between 10 and 15 of 30 would generally be considered a success." Some added that if the food/snack budget were to be significantly reduced, attendance would be even lower.

Many of those we talked to suggested that the overall perception, by both funders and staff, is that the enrichment sessions are not taken overly seriously, except for the job-readiness sessions. Several added that, because there appear to be few consequences if there are patterns of low attendance at enrichment sessions, the significance of this component of the program is further undermined. The perception is that no one is held particularly accountable for the degree of attendance at the sessions, although it is a factor that is considered when decisions are being made about student level of effort, and whether a student should be dismissed from or retained in the program.

Volunteering and Community Service

The HW-SC requires, at least on paper, that each student must complete 20 hours of community service each year. Yet many YAs expressed the belief that it was unrealistic to expect that students who were themselves in need of so much support should be held accountable for providing volunteer community service at this point in their lives. Others consider the requirement to be important, to help students understand the value of volunteering their time within the community. However, *because this component lacks effective or consistent enforcement or monitoring, it simply does not get implemented on a consistent basis across all YAs and students.*

Conclusions

The program's approaches to enrichment and community service activities are among the most inconsistent aspects of HW-SC, with considerable variation across YAs and Managers. HW-SC needs to determine and monitor more consistent approaches to both.

15. PREPARING FOR AND OBTAINING STUDENT JOBS

Among the major reasons students agree to enter HW-SC is the opportunity to obtain a job. Almost 80% of the students surveyed during the evaluation rated job training received through the program as helpful or very helpful, though a smaller proportion (65%) said the program's job placement efforts had been helpful or very helpful, while 16% of the students had indicated that such efforts had been "not helpful" (see Chapter 11).

Indeed, *despite the focus on work as one of the key components of the program model, relatively few HW-SC students actually maintain part-time jobs at any given time while in the program.* Students are eligible to apply for employment through the program only if their grade point average is at least 2.0 and they have completed Job-Readiness Training (JRT) and received certification thereof. Program data discussed in Chapter 10 indicate that, of the program's students 14 and older, only between one-third and a half at any given time during 2003 were eligible for employment; most are not eligible because of grade deficiencies. Of those who were eligible, between half and two-thirds of those 16 and older were actually employed in any given month (the proportions would be lower if 15-year-olds were included in the calculations). Overall, including both jobs obtained through the program and those obtained by students on their own, about one-quarter of all high school students in the program held jobs in a typical month in 2003, through September. Once employed, job termination rates have been relatively low, according to program and selected employer data.

Given that context, this chapter explores what the program is and has been doing to improve those numbers in the future, how those efforts are perceived by those within the program and by representatives of the employer community, and what efforts may be needed in the future—both by the HW-SC and by others within the employer and academic communities—to create both more jobs and more HW-SC students ready to fill those positions.

Creation of Employment Development Specialist Position

In response to the context described above, and in anticipation of growing needs for student training and job placement efforts as the program was rapidly expanding, the HW-SC created a senior management-level Employment Development Specialist (EDS) position in 2002. Given the importance of the job training and work-related component of the program, the new EDS position has been described by key officials within the HW-SC as "the key to the future of the program." Indeed, the importance of the focus of the position has subsequently been underscored by the creation in 2003 of a second position designed to supplement the efforts of the EDS.

Complementary Goals

Together, the two complementary positions are designed to accomplish the *twin goals of improving the job-readiness training component of the program and increasing the numbers of job-ready students, while at the same time expanding the number of new jobs available to, and filled by, HW-SC students.*

Much of the focus of the Employment Development Specialist position to date has been on creating and standardizing a consistent job-readiness training component that effectively prepares students to be employable. The JRT component, culminating in a certification by the program that a student has satisfactorily completed the training (as discussed in more detail below), is designed to provide prospective employers with high levels of assurance that students will be ready to perform to their satisfaction if hired, and that they will be retrained in appropriate areas if problems arise on the job. Making students ready for the world of work means focusing, according to the program, on "the 3 A's: Academics, Attendance, and Attitude."

The other key focus of the EDS position is on new job placement creation. In the past few months, as the assistant position was created and was able to assume more responsibility for monitoring training and certification activities, increasing proportions (an estimated 70%) of the time of the EDS have been devoted to the creation of new job placement opportunities for HW-SC students. Much of the job-related focus has been on strengthening the core relationships with Wegmans, as the primary provider of jobs for program students. But *increasingly, the EDS focus has begun to shift,*

and needs to continue to increasingly do so, to the creation of jobs with a wide variety of non-Wegmans employers, for the good of the future of the program.

Concerns

Although most of those we interviewed emphasized the importance of training and job development specialized efforts as integral components of a successful HW-SC model, some concerns were expressed with regard to the evolution of the EDS and the assistant position. The first concern had to do with the fear that creating an expanded and more comprehensive JRT component might add to the frustrations of students by "dragging out" the time it could take them to obtain jobs, and that delays in obtaining certification following successful completion of the training could cause further frustrations. The response to that concern from administrative/management officials of the program is that the more extensive training is necessary to retain existing employer support and to recruit additional employers for the future, and that the addition of the second employment/training position should negate any appreciable delays in obtaining certification once training is completed.

A second concern expressed to CGR in several interviews was that too much attention was being given to meeting Wegmans' needs, without sufficient corresponding focus on creating new job placement opportunities. No one questioned the importance of working closely with the program's largest employer, but the concern was that an appropriate balance be struck and maintained. As noted, increasing effort is being devoted to the development of new employment opportunities, not only by the EDS, but also by the program's Executive Director and the President of the Hillside Children's Foundation, working in partnership with the program (see below).

The final broad concern had to do with some confusion about the increasing role of the EDS in taking over more of the training and job linkage roles previously played by the Youth Advocates. As with any new position, there have been periods and issues of confusion as to roles and responsibilities. There is a continuing need to be careful about communicating clearly who is responsible for what, and for underscoring that the EDS position is not intended to usurp any of the core student-focused roles of the YAs, but instead is designed as a support resource to the YAs and

the students, with a focus on enhancing training and job-creation opportunities that could not be accomplished by the separate efforts of YAs acting individually.

Barriers to Securing and Maintaining Employment

Before exploring in more detail the issues of student training, job creation, and successful performance on the job, a word about barriers to employment, as perceived by students in the program. Many of the students we met with told us that the process of securing and succeeding in jobs was more difficult than they had initially believed. Some had assumed that the program name suggested a guarantee of, or at least easier access to, employment opportunities through the program. Many were disappointed to learn that the process of becoming certified in JRT can be more time consuming than expected. If students, because of family commitments, sports participation or other commitments, cannot attend enrichment sessions, they must work with their Advocate or the Employment Development Specialist to obtain certification through individual meetings and the like. If students' grades are too low, they are ineligible to obtain work through the program.

In addition, HW-SC students live in the city and yet most of the Wegmans stores (and other employers) where many can find jobs are located in the suburbs, ranging from a store in Pittsford, which is located on a main bus line, to a store in Webster, which is not easily accessed by public transportation. The trip from downtown to Pittsford takes approximately 45 minutes by bus. And students who work in Webster need families or friends with cars, or driver assistance from the program. Students told us of having been offered jobs that they were unable to take because of transportation problems. The program is working on solutions to these and related job access problems, but *in a society in which jobs are increasingly in the suburbs, but those most in need of the jobs are often city residents without easy access to the jobs, the disconnect can create substantial barriers to employment for even the most motivated students.*

The program needs to find ways to more effectively make more jobs more accessible to more students.

If the process of obtaining work through the program is unsuccessful, many students simply seek jobs on their own. They work in nursing homes, recreation centers, hospitals, at fast-food restaurants, as babysitters, but they do so without the on-site support systems that are intended to help them succeed when they obtain jobs through HW-SC.

For those who are successful in obtaining jobs, their attitudes toward work vary considerably. Some students have successfully held jobs within the program for several years and believe that they can expect future employment once they finish school. Others admit to frustration over having to do perceived menial, entry-level work that, in some cases, was enough to lead them to quit their jobs. Staff recounted a number of stories of students who needed retraining in customer service once they started working and encountered difficulties in the workplace. Ultimately many of these problems were able to be resolved through the joint efforts and support of the program, coupled with support from mentors on the job site—through additional coaching, role-playing and reminders about the importance of meeting an employer's expectations. Such continual training and even re-training that students receive through the program forms an integral part of the model that helps many HW-SC students overcome obstacles to succeeding on the job.

Job-Readiness Training

Student training and preparation begin with the Job-Readiness Training (JRT) component of the program. Typically students have obtained such training through enrichment sessions or, if they are unable to attend enrichments, through meetings with their Youth Advocates. As JRT has evolved, it now consists of about 15 hours of sessions scattered throughout the year. Typically, these sessions are presented to students during their freshman year in high school, with subsequent "training refreshments" as needed. Students who started in the HW-SC in middle school have typically preceded the JRT sessions with opportunities to explore career interests, do some job shadowing, and other activities designed to provide a broad introduction to the world of work.

Some HW-SC students are offered an alternative to scattered JRT sessions throughout the year. Twice a year, about 25 urban students (typically 20 or so from HW-SC) are offered intensive training through a six-week Academy offered over six consecutive Saturdays. The Academy offers 30 hours of "fast track" enhanced training for students specifically recommended for the training. Students must be 15, have at least a 2.0 GPA, at least 90% attendance in school, and "a good attitude." If these students are willing to make the Saturday commitments and stick with the program, they are able to expedite the training process and

become eligible for jobs much sooner than the other students in the program. Others must be exposed to the regular JRT process, which is typically spread out over several months during the school year.

A More Consistent JRT Approach

In the past, the job-readiness training provided by the program has been somewhat idiosyncratic and "totally inconsistent across schools," according to many of those we interviewed. Individual Youth Advocates, or teams of advocates in particular schools, developed their own approaches as part of overall individualized enrichment session strategies, as described in the previous chapter. Both the number and specific content of training sessions varied across Advocates and schools. Although some YAs have preferred this approach, *increasingly the program and employers have agreed that a more consistent approach to JRT is necessary, so employers can be assured that any students from the program in the future will be exposed to a reasonably consistent series of sessions covering such topics as leadership development, customer service, computer basics, business and office skills, appropriate grooming and good work attitudes, etc.*

> **A more consistent approach is needed, and being developed, to the provision of JRT across the program. The approach should build on existing proven models.**

The program has been in the process of developing a manual that lays out the core curriculum for the sessions and that suggests outside resources who might be tapped to provide certain sessions. One suggested approach might be to have mentors or supervisors from selected employers, who have a history of working well with program students in the past, lead certain sessions. The more realistic the training sessions can be, with practical advice from potential employers, the more valuable the training is likely to be in the future. As much as possible, the HW-SC approach should build on models already proven and in place in the community, rather than reinventing the wheel. As this report is being written, the manual and the more consistent approach to JRT is in the process of being finalized for presentation and discussion within the program.

Job-Ready Certifications

Following completion of the training, the EDS or the assistant must certify that the student is "job ready," based on a review of the student's attendance at JRT sessions, review of the student's portfolio, and a mock interview which the EDS or assistant conducts with the student (in some cases, employer representatives conduct these interviews). If a student is deemed

not to be ready at that point, the program sets up "refreshers" as needed to correct any weaknesses. Once the student has been certified, job placement linkages can begin to be established. Although some YAs complain that this further delays the process of finding jobs for students, the certification process provides an additional assurance for employers that students have passed through a consistently-administered final assessment of their job readiness.

Expansion of Job Sites

The large increases in the numbers of students who have entered the HW-SC in the past two years suggest that there will be increasing demands for part-time jobs by those students, beginning over the next year or two. *As these students go through more consistent JRT, and are certified as job ready—and assuming that the program develops ways to increase the proportions of students who meet the 2.0 GPA requirement for employability—the current number of program job sites and available placement opportunities will fall significantly below the number of needed future placement opportunities.*

> **More jobs and more eligible/employable students will be needed for the core premise of the work-scholarship connection to continue to be viable in the future.**

Even now, *there is evidence that there are both insufficient numbers of employable (i.e., GPA-eligible) students and insufficient numbers of jobs.* Wegmans appears willing and eager to hire more students, and plans to increase the numbers of HW-SC students it wishes to hire in the next year, yet reports that there are not enough employable students to meet the demands at this point. At the same time, data cited earlier indicate that substantial numbers of students who do meet the standards for employment have not been placed in jobs through the program. Those gaps are likely to grow larger over the next two years, if no corrective actions are taken.

Growing Gaps in Needed Jobs

The issue of job expansion is crucial to the future of the program. If there are not enough jobs to meet the demand, and if greater numbers of students do not meet the academic requirements to become eligible for those jobs, the core premise of the program, and the underlying incentives at the heart of the "work-scholarship connection," would be seriously eroded. The program is currently falling short of its stated goal of providing jobs to 70% of its eligible students, and with those numbers of students expected to increase, the ability to meet that goal will be further compromised without significant increases in the numbers of employers willing to sign on as Employer Partners—or even just as employers willing to hire students from the program, even if

they are not able to fully commit to guaranteeing to provide on-site mentors.

Creating new employer job sites for the program is a slow and difficult business. Recruiting potential new employer sites, and convincing them that it is in their interests to join with HW-SC in making job opportunities available to program students, takes time, and is very labor intensive. Currently, about 70% of the Employment Development Specialist's time, plus considerable time of the program's Executive Director and of the President of the Hillside Children's Foundation, are devoted to developing new employers and job sites. The EDS's goal is to develop three new employer prospects per quarter, with the expectation that at least half of those will yield job placements. But most of those, even if successful, will not generate the large numbers of new job opportunities needed to respond to the growing need of program students. Wegmans plans to request more HW-SC students, but a broader array of job sites is also needed, as not everyone wants to work at Wegmans or consider following that career path. Even with the anticipated Wegmans increases, the number of additional employers needed in the future is likely to fall short of demand, without significant change in the way sites are recruited.

Despite the focused attention being placed on employer recruitment by the HW-SC, it is simply unrealistic and not practical to think that the three lead people could by themselves even come close to recruiting enough employer sites and possible job openings to meet the anticipated program need over the next few years. No matter how persistent and effective they are (and they have developed a number of promising leads in the past year or so), they cannot realistically be expected to be able to generate more than a fraction of the anticipated need at any time in the near future, let alone in time to be ready for the increases in needed jobs as soon as within the next year.

A Broad Appeal for New HW-SC Employers

Thus it would appear that *the program needs to be talking to key people at places like the Rochester Business Alliance and the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment Board (and perhaps groups like Rochester Works, with its linkages to small businesses) about helping to market the HW-SC—and the need for their various constituencies to consider the benefits to them and to the community of making jobs available to the trained, employable students from the HW-SC.* The representatives of the program could then

> **In order to create sufficient new jobs to meet the program's future needs, and to challenge the employer community, the HW-SC needs help from broad-based business coalitions to help recruit and publicize the needs and the opportunities.**

efficiently follow up on the leads generated by the initial overtures through such larger groups. *Such a large-scale advertising approach targeted to large groups of employers would appear to be essential if the program is to have any realistic chance of creating enough new job opportunities in a short enough period of time to be ready to respond to the forthcoming growing need.*

In order to convince many more employers than the current eight Employer Partners[19] (see below) that it is in their interest to hire program students (and hopefully provide mentoring support as well), it is not likely to be sufficient to appeal to the altruistic instincts of most employers with a "please hire our kids" approach. Rather, *it will be crucial to be able to convince potential employers that hiring such job-ready, employable young people, with a support structure working with them, will "help the employers help themselves."*

Employer Partners and Mentors

Once a student is certified as job ready, the program ideally attempts to help the student find a job placement with an employer compatible with the student's interests, and where a mentoring relationship will be possible. Relationships between employer-based mentors and student employees are one of the distinguishing features of the HW-SC, to the extent that job placements are developed through the program.

Currently, there are eight separate employers considered by the program to be "Employer Partners." In addition to committing to providing mentors for student employees, these Partners also typically commit to providing a student a job for at least a year, and for at least 500 hours during the year (the number of hours may vary up or down for some employers depending on the student's grade and GPA in school). In exchange for the commitment from the employer, the program commits to providing students who have been certified as job ready, and who enter the placement with at least a 2.0 academic average.

Although the amount varied considerably from month to month, *an average of about 60% of all job placements for HW-SC students throughout 2003 have been with Employer Partners*, with Wegmans

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[19] About 40 additional employers have provided jobs this year to HW-SC students, but most of those students were hired based on their own applications, not through the program. Thus few if any offer formal mentoring support to the students.

representing the vast majority of those placements. Most of the Employer Partners provide between one and five job placements at any given time, with the exception of Wegmans, which in 2003 averaged about 84 HW-SC student employees each month through September in Rochester, with a monthly average of another 11 in the Syracuse area.

Expansion of Employer Partner Jobs

Wegmans would like to considerably expand its number of HW-SC student placements over the next year. Toward that end, it has made a commitment to "donate," with all expenses covered by Wegmans, two "loaned executives" to the HW-SC, to be trained and function as new Youth Advocates, each to carry a full caseload of 30 HW-SC students who are employed at Wegmans. This would represent the first contingent of an expanded number of Wegmans/HW-SC students. Many, if not all, of this first group of additional 60 students would already be employed by Wegmans, but would not have been exposed to the special training or individual supportive services provided by the program. It is not clear at this point whether, in addition to immediately being assigned to a Youth Advocate, these students would be expected to retroactively be exposed to the JRT, and what proportion of the students currently meet the program's GPA eligibility requirements. It is fair to ask if this group will become in effect its own separate subgroup within the program, receiving specialized attention different from that of the program's other students, or whether it will be blended in seamlessly with the rest of the program.

Beyond Wegmans, the HW-SC is also attempting to expand the number of students employed by other Employer Partners. As just noted, considerable expansion of job sites will become necessary in the near future. Some of those anticipated new employers may already be hiring HW-SC students, but based on student applications outside the program placement process. Bringing on such employers as more formal partners with the program should subject them to the standard commitments of the Employer Partners spelled out above.

Workplace Mentors

While a number of HW-SC students have found jobs on their own, without the assistance of the program's Employment Development Specialist, those who work for one of the Employer

Partners are more likely to receive support in the workplace. The commitment of the Partners to provide mentors for students they employ from the program typically means a 1-to-1 relationship between a mentor and a student employee, although in some cases, the relationship may be more akin to a mentor assigned to a small group of students. Ideally, each designated mentor has gone through a 4-hour training session (provided by Wegmans, even for interested non-Wegmans employees). If such a commitment to training has not been made, mentors are at least provided with a manual outlining the roles and expectations of mentors. In some situations, at least on a temporary basis, a student placement may be made with an Employer Partner with no mentor available, where the supervisor of the student will be designated to act as the mentor. How well that "proxy" role works could not be determined during the study.

Mentor Impact

As noted in Chapter 10, the promise of mentors within even the Employer Partners has not been fulfilled in a fairly high proportion of cases. During one recent period, data for 85 Employer Partner students indicated that about 35% of them did not, at least at that time, have a designated mentor. Additional data over a two-year period suggested the significance of their absence: 29% of 66 HW-SC Employer Partner students who terminated during that period had not had mentors assigned to them at the time.

CGR conversations with students further underscored the inconsistency of the workplace mentoring component of the program. Several of the students said that they met with their mentors each day they were at work, while others met on a weekly basis. Other students said that they knew who their mentor was and talked once or twice each month. One student said that his mentor had been transferred to a different store and he had yet to be assigned a new one. Still others had no knowledge of having a mentor, and did not understand what the mentor's role was intended to be, even though they were employed by an Employer Partner. In a few cases, both students and Youth Advocates expressed concerns that some mentors may be "too suburban in their attitudes toward urban kids, and some probably need some diversity training." But clearly for those students who have involved and active mentors, the relationship in the majority of

cases is perceived to be a valuable one. Several students said that the mentors can be a good source of advice about work-related issues and often serve as the first resource when questions or problems arise.

Written HW-SC materials specify that Youth Advocates are expected to visit their students' employers on a monthly basis and to maintain weekly phone contact with their workplace mentors. Yet communications do not always seem to flow smoothly between mentors and Advocates, and it appears that the flow of information can get bogged down in either direction. Advocates complained that while work-site mentors have the potential to provide valuable information as to how students are internalizing much of the teaching from their Job-Readiness Training, there is little sharing of this information. Advocates do not always receive copies of their students' workplace performance reviews, and some indicated that often the only time they hear from a mentor is when something goes seriously wrong in the workplace. And in some cases, they learn about the problem long after it has happened. By the same token, Advocates are not always in close contact with mentors, either to request information, or to share perspectives from the YA's point of view.

> **Communications and working relationships between YAs and mentors has not always been consistent across the program.**

Closer communications between YAs and mentors would in all likelihood help improve student performance both at school and work, as linkages and incentives between the two sectors could be more effectively developed and maintained. *To aid in this process, it would probably be helpful for YAs to become more exposed to, and obtain more training related to, the business world, in order to help them better understand that culture and be better able to work with students concerning career opportunities.* YAs and the Employment Development Specialist should also be developing approaches to employers of students who do not have assigned mentors, to advocate with the appropriate persons within those Employer Partners to try to link students with mentors at the earliest possible time.

Assessment of Problems on the Job

Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection materials allude to plans for formalizing processes when students lose their jobs. The program seeks to develop an exit interview to be conducted with both the student and the employer. Results of these interviews would help to determine the nature of a student's struggles and

how he or she needs to be retrained before reentering the workforce. Such interviews could also help identify improvements that both the program and employer could consider for the future. Although such interviews would be easier to undertake under agreements with Employer Partners, ideally efforts should be undertaken to implement such interviews with all employers of HW-SC students, wherever possible.

The Importance of Linkages: Jobs, GPAs, and Mentors

The genius of the premise of the Work-Scholarship Connection is just that: the <u>connection</u> between work and scholarship or academic performance. The premise was that a focus on jobs alone in the program would not be that effective, and neither would a focus on academics alone. But linking the two would have an effect greater than either could alone.

> **The program must strengthen the linkage between jobs as incentives to help motivate improved student academic performance.**

Up to now, the program has not had sufficient numbers of jobs available to meet the needs of all employable students, but neither have enough students had high enough grade point averages to require the need for great expansions of jobs. Now, *over the next year or two, with larger numbers of students in the program reaching the ages where they will be realistically able to obtain jobs if they meet the program requirements, the real test of the program will occur.* The program will need to generate enough jobs to create sufficient incentives to motivate students to improve their grades in order to have a realistic chance to obtain a job. And, equally important, the program will need to find ways to provide sufficient academic supports to enable more students to overcome any educational deficiencies to do well enough in their courses that enough students will be eligible to fill the increasing numbers of jobs. That is, *both the numbers of jobs and job-ready students must be expanded at the same time. One cannot wait for the other. Both efforts must be parallel and ongoing simultaneously.*

> **Jobs and job-ready students must both be expanded simultaneously, and the jobs must be linked to incentives to achieve academically.**

And, realistically, to the extent possible, the jobs generated must be linked to the requirement of a 2.0 GPA to be eligible. *If employers are recruited who are willing to accept students from the program, but without conditions of a required minimum academic performance level, the incentive will disappear.* Any pitch to recruit more employers to partner with the program must make this point clear. Moreover, employers should be strongly encouraged to work closely with Youth Advocates to reduce job hours if a student's GPA falls

below a 2.0 level once on the job, with the understanding that the hours will be restored once the academic performance is back on track. Again, *the importance of the incentive—the connection between work and academic performance—needs to remain front and center for the program to have its desired long-term effect.*

Moreover, the admittedly-incomplete data available to us during the evaluation suggest the added effect mentors can have on helping to keep students in jobs. We have no definitive proof of cause and effect relationships, but the fact that 29% of a group of job terminations over a two-year period did not have mentors at least raises some question about the impact their presence can have on the success of students on the job. More complete data on the relationship between mentors and staying in school, academic performance and job performance should be tracked by the program in the future.

Up to this point, the HW-SC has had a significant level of success in graduating its students. It has accomplished this despite having only moderate success in making its students eligible for jobs, or in creating jobs for those who were eligible. *As the program goes forward, if it is able to fulfill its potential to be more successful, as we believe it can be, in creating more jobs and improving academic performance so more students are employable, its overall impact on the future of its students should be even greater.*

Conclusions

The program has not developed a consistent approach to job-readiness training, though such an approach is in the process of being implemented, hopefully by building on the work of others with experience in this area. The program also needs to work in partnership with others in the community to develop more jobs that build in mentoring for students, and to assure that increased numbers of students meet the academic requirements to obtain and successfully retain such jobs. Progress on both of these fronts is needed to be consistent with the core premise of the program model: the connection between work and scholarship/academic achievement.

16. PREPARATION FOR LIFE AFTER GRADUATION

Through their exposure to the expectations of the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, HW-SC students are introduced, in many cases for the first time, to higher standards of performance and achievement. For many students, some who come from families in which no one has ever gone to college, the idea that a college education is something realistically to be strived for, is a dramatic expectation indeed. Moreover, as designed, the program offers students systems of support, and means for incremental achievement, that make possible such expectations. Almost 80% of the program students in our survey agreed or strongly agreed that they were more likely to go to college because of HW-SC. For example, as part of quarterly goal-setting, Youth Advocates meet with students to establish academic goals and expectations and are encouraged to elicit the support of parents/guardians to ensure that students remain focused on their goals, both short-term and long-term. In addition, part of a Youth Advocate's job description includes discussing with students both graduation, post-graduation and Regents requirements.

Many HW-SC students have parents who have experienced school as a place of frustration, and even failure, and for whom discussions about positive academic and post-graduation outcomes rarely take place in the home. Thus, the act of discussing school as a place with a positive impact on one's future can be novel indeed.

Creating Realistic Student Dreams and Expectations

Feedback from both Youth Advocates and students confirms the impact that discussions with program staff, especially in the context of a supportive and trusting relationship, can have on students and their aspirations. An important part of these discussions is changing the mindset of students, and in some cases of their parents—and schools—to create an environment in which it is possible to nurture an expectation of success and potential for the future, and one in which low expectations can be overcome.

At the same time, it is also important from the early stages of program involvement to find the balance between optimism and belief in a positive future with heightened goals and aspirations on the one hand, and realistic

expectations and cause-and-effect relationships on the other. For example, most students join HW-SC at least in part because of access to both employment and to college opportunities and scholarships. Program staff worry that students sometimes fall prey to the mistaken belief that program participation *guarantees* them a job and a scholarship. The program instead offers students improved *opportunities* to earn such things, but only if students help create those opportunities through their own actions.

It is incumbent on the program to help students and parents understand that there is a strong link between early and ongoing strong academic performance and future success and college opportunities, and that the students are responsible for establishing that link with their academic performance throughout their school career. The program can encourage students to entertain new dreams and aspirations, and it can help make students' dreams come to fruition. But ultimately the students themselves are responsible for making their possibilities become realities.

To provide as much support as possible to help students attain their post-graduation goals, the program has included college preparation activities among student enrichment sessions and the Career Planning and Placement efforts that students are exposed to. The program has made it possible for students to attend college fairs and visits to specific colleges; and PSAT exams and SAT preparation are provided to prospective college applicants. In addition, to supplement the efforts of Youth Advocates to help students in the process of remaining on track to accomplish their post-graduation goals, and to provide additional support to guide students through the potentially cumbersome maze of the college application process, the program recently created a new position to provide focused attention on helping students succeed in getting into, and succeeding in, the post-secondary institution or job of their choice.

Creation of Coordinator for Seniors and Graduates

HW-SC in 2002 created the senior level position of Coordinator for Seniors and Graduates. The position was designed as a resource to provide support to YAs in helping students understand and successfully negotiate the process and the mechanics of preparing and applying for college, preparing for and taking necessary aptitude tests, determining colleges of interest and

visiting at least some of them, understanding the process and implications of financial aid, and completing applications for such aid. In many ways, the Coordinator position was created to function as a Guidance Counselor dedicated to addressing the specific needs of the HW-SC students. In addition, the Coordinator is charged with the responsibility for expanding scholarship opportunities for students, and for maintaining contact with, and offering support to, graduates of the program for two years post-graduation.

Rationale for Position   Much of what the Coordinator focuses on was already being done at some level by Youth Advocates prior to the creation of the new position. However, the process was being carried out by YAs who brought to the process different levels of involvement, different approaches, and different levels of college preparation understanding and experience. Even though the YAs saw the college preparation process as an important part of their job—and most graduates of the program were already historically going on to college—most of the YAs were not experienced in all the myriad aspects of college recruitment and preparation, and it was easy for aspects of the process to fall through the cracks in some cases.

Moreover, *the program reasoned that the college preparation aspects of the program would be increasing substantially, with the rapid expansion in numbers of students in the past two years.* The first direct manifestation of those increases as it pertains to the college preparation process is that the junior class within the program during the 2003-04 academic year is about doubled from a year ago, to more than 200 students in Rochester and Syracuse combined. With the need for significant college preparation well in advance of the students' senior years, the program decided there was a need for more concentrated attention on all aspects of the process than could be provided by individual YAs, for whom this would represent only a portion of their responsibilities.

Thus *the program determined that it would be helpful to have the primary responsibility for the individual student college preparation process remain with the YAs, building on their relationships with their students—but that the overall likelihood of successful outcomes across all program graduates would be increased if the HW-SC hired a person experienced in the college application*

and admissions process, and charged the person in that position with creating systems and consistent approaches, schedules and procedures to be followed for all students engaged in the college preparation process. The Coordinator would set up and facilitate and coordinate the various tasks, and would be directly involved in some, though the primary responsibility for keeping students on schedule, and for assuring that the various tasks were completed, would remain with the student's YA. The Coordinator role was primarily envisioned as one of stimulating, planning, advising, developing strategies, and coordinating.

Focus of Position

The primary focus of the position was designed to emphasize college preparation (and other forms of post-secondary educational opportunities), although emphasis is also placed on helping other graduates achieve career placement goals that may not involve post-secondary education. Much of the focus of the Coordinator is on helping to create an excitement about college, and helping students believe that they can accomplish the goal of college admission, while at the same time *continuing to hammer home the need for students to understand that the goal will be attainable only if they are taking steps along the way to prepare academically, so that their records will entice colleges not only to accept them, but to find them worthy of consideration for academic scholarships.*

To that end, the Coordinator has created a four-year outline, by year, of what students should be doing each high school year in preparation for college, so that they will be as attractive to college admissions officers as possible when their applications are submitted. That guide has been shared with YAs and also serves as a reminder to them of what their students need to be focusing on at each stage of their high school career. Beyond that, the Coordinator is responsible for helping lay out, and assist the students and YAs in dealing with, the "nuts and bolts" of the college preparation process, including scheduling and orchestrating college visits, preparing for and taking SATs, completing applications, helping students think through essays as part of the application process, understanding aspects of financial aid and completing the necessary forms, seeking out scholarship opportunities for students, etc.

Post-Graduation Goals

The goal of the Coordinator is for at least 75% of all program graduates each year to go on to some form of post-secondary education, and for at least half of those students to enroll in a four-year college or university. In recent years, as noted in Chapter 6, the program has consistently met the first goal, while often falling somewhat short of the second. *With higher numbers of students admitted to the program in recent years, and higher proportions of those students admitted with relatively lower GPAs than in earlier years, the program will face increasing challenges to reach these goals in the future*, without additional academic supports, as emphasized earlier in the report.

> **The expanded numbers of students in the program, many with low GPAs, adds to the challenges of preparing students for college.**

These realities underscore all the more the importance of adhering to the four-year "game plan" developed by the Coordinator, which emphasizes the critical importance of focusing on academics and strong grades from the first semester of the student's high school career. And even before that, it is important to begin to have students and their parents focusing on strong academics and the choices they make as early as middle school years. To that end, the Coordinator has begun to focus on ways of making presentations to student enrichment sessions as early as 7th and 8th grades, to begin to plant seeds about college and how students need to prepare. Without such targeted and continuing attention to the goal of academic success, and to overcoming the recent downward trends in academic performance among program students, the post-secondary goals of the program are likely to become more and more elusive.

Relationship of Coordinator with YA Positions

As the Coordinator position has evolved, a number of issues have been raised concerning the shared and separate responsibilities of the Coordinator and the Youth Advocates, and the relationship between the different functions. The Coordinator position was envisioned primarily as a resource/support position for the YAs. The intent was that the person in the position should be helping, not usurping any roles, and that the Coordinator should be an additional asset, as part of a team approach, with jointly-developed strategies, and with specific roles needing to be clearly defined and spelled out.

Nonetheless, clearly there are overlapping areas of responsibilities, and the fact that the Coordinator has taken over at least some

aspects of tasks formerly fully within the province of YAs has caused some confusion during the first year of the position. In some cases these differences can be attributed to normal "growing pains" and issues that simply would need time to be worked out as in any transitional period, but in other instances it appears that issues remained unresolved due to the lack of careful communication and honest sharing of ideas and different perspectives between the various parties, coupled in some cases by lack of sufficient support in such discussions from management staff.

Some of these issues appear to be moving toward resolution. But *careful attention is still needed to the establishment of a two-way communication process that offers opportunities for constructive input to be considered from all sources before final decisions are made about procedures and practices that will affect large numbers of students and staff, and which will have considerable impact on important outcome measures against which the program will be judged in the future.*

Need for Pre-College Orientation

An area of responsibility which has not been emphasized to a great extent in the past—by either YAs on a consistent basis, or in the first year of the Coordinator's tenure in the program—has to do with the basic preparation of students for what to expect as part of their college experience. In our interviews with YAs, some suggested that *more attention should be placed in the future on providing prospective college students, once they have been accepted, with a practical orientation concerning things to consider and prepare for as they go off to college. This practical guidance was viewed by some of the YAs as being especially important, given that most of the students have no role models or parents with college backgrounds to provide them with any perspective based on previous college experience.*

Such practical advice and orientation might include such issues as how to deal with cultural environments different from what students are used to, life in college dorms, course selection and enrollment, how to use the health center at college, what to take to college and what to leave home, adjusting to roommates and to newfound freedoms, costs of books and transportation and other "hidden costs" of college life, and so on. Providing such practical advice and suggestions in advance, say these Advocates, could be helpful in preparing students for their college experience and

could, in some cases, make the difference in how successfully a student negotiates the initial college experience.

Expanded Followup with Graduates

As a logical followup to the pre-college orientation idea, increasing focus of the Coordinator position will be devoted, beginning this year, to tracking what happens to graduates of the program. The program makes a commitment to continuing to stay in touch with students for two years after they graduate. Up to now, the primary focus of such followup efforts has been on those who continue in post-secondary education, but in the future such efforts should include those who pursue jobs or other non-educational efforts as well. *As the program goes forward, it will attempt to track more realistically not only the destinations of students immediately following graduation, but also what happens in the first two years after they graduate.* For example, to what extent do students admitted to college remain successfully enrolled? To what extent do enrollees in community colleges transfer or ultimately continue on to four-year institutions? To what extent do students obtain and retain scholarships?

In addition to tracking such data for purposes of continuing to assess program impact, and for learning about ways of continuing to improve the program, increased focus on followup activities should be thought of as an opportunity to provide practical advice and guidance to students who are facing difficult issues or decisions concerning their college experiences. Although there are typically specific resources on campus to help students, it should be remembered that many of the HW-SC graduates do not have any historical perspective to draw upon to suggest how to address certain issues or even to know how to access certain on-campus resources to help in that process. Thus, the ability of the Coordinator to remain a resource and guide to students during, in particular, the transitional first year at college, could be very important in helping to ensure a successful experience for most students.

Future Expansion of Coordinator Staff

With the added responsibilities being suggested here, and anticipated by the program, and the reality of additional students for whom college preparation activities will need to be coordinated, it seems likely to CGR that a second position to supplement the efforts of the Coordinator may be needed within the next year or so. It may be that the primary focus of the person in the second position would be on the post-graduation/alumni

aspects of the position. And it may be that such a position could be done on a half-time basis, or at least could be initially tried at that level, or as part of a full-time position with other shared responsibilities. Either way, it seems likely that additional support will be needed if the broad array of responsibilities related to the Coordinator position is to be successfully undertaken—particularly given the increasing numbers of students for whom college preparation activities will need to be addressed, and for whom post-graduate followup will be needed, beginning in the next year or two.

Conclusions

With the expanded number of students expected to reach their senior years over the next couple years, the need for more careful attention to preparation for post-secondary education and career opportunities will become more pronounced. This means, among other things, the need for a more careful delineation of responsibilities and working relationships between the Coordinator position and YAs and Managers. It also means, especially as consideration is given to the possible creation of a second graduate-related position, the need for a clear specification of goals against which to hold the current position (or two in the future) accountable. Such goals would include those already in place, i.e., proportion of graduates continuing with post-secondary education, and the proportion going on to 4-year colleges or universities. In addition, *other goals might include increasing SAT scores of students in the program, scholarships obtained and successfully maintained, successful continuation of studies within college, proportion employed full-time if not in college, etc.*

17. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT WITH PROGRAM

The HW-SC has placed considerable focus on parents as integral to the success of the program. Many of the issues that students face are family issues, at least in part, and ideally the program prefers to focus on these issues holistically with the entire family, rather than just isolating attention on the student. However, realistically it is rare that the program is able to engage the entire family around resolution of such issues, so that most of the program's efforts are targeted specifically to the students.

Short of involving the parents in efforts to address family issues, the HW-SC has attempted to at least engage the parents as partners with the program and its Youth Advocates in the effort to provide needed support and motivation for the young people in the program. Parental support of the program's efforts on behalf of their students is viewed by HW-SC officials as an important ingredient of the program's ability to be successful in keeping students engaged and focused on improving their academic performance, and in pursuing graduation and the goal of post-secondary education.

Parental involvement is manifested in the following ways:

Initial Agreement to Participate

As part of the initial process by which a student is officially admitted to the program, a parent or guardian must sign a "Student and Parent Contract" which outlines the expectations the program makes of each participant student. In most cases, this parental signature is obtained in the context of a discussion in the student/parent home with the Youth Advocate, who explains in some detail the program, its intent, its services, its expectations, and what the parent is asked to do. This meeting provides an important opportunity to establish a good relationship of trust up front with the parent. Parents are requested to commit to working closely with the program and the student to help ensure that the program goals are met, and that their student will make the desired progress while in the program. The relationship between the student's academic performance and any possibility of jobs, graduation, the possibility of college and of any performance-based scholarships is spelled out at that time. In many cases,

according to the YAs, parents do become true partners and supporters of their efforts, but in too many other cases, their perception is that most of the parents, "even when they want to do the right thing by their child, do not have the skills or resources to be a strong motivator or disciplinarian with their child, so in most cases the burden of stimulating the student falls back primarily on the Advocate."

Quarterly Contact with Parents

Once a quarter, each parent is supposed to receive a home visit from the Advocate for his/her child. At this time, the YA is to go over in some detail the current status of the student's progress in the program, those areas where progress is being made as well as problem areas where improvement is needed. The progress is outlined against short-term and longer-term goals spelled out in a quarterly Individual Development Plan (IDP) form for each student. The key focus of the meetings is on maintaining a good relationship between the program, the YA and the parent, and hopefully on keeping the parent engaged in working with the program and the student to effect positive levels of student attendance and academic achievement in school, and continuing active involvement within the program. The meetings also provide opportunities to ask the parent about what more the program can be doing, and to suggest what more the parent can be doing on behalf of the student. The meetings are also reminders of the ongoing importance of the student's academic performance at all times. In between the quarterly visits, parents typically receive a monthly phone call from the Advocate to provide any updates and to see if the parent has any questions or concerns. Parents are also free to contact the Advocates at any time on their own.

Parental Signatures

Perhaps the most controversial and problematic indicator used by the program to measure parental involvement is parent signatures. For those students who are considered TANF students, and whose involvement in the program is funded through the Teen Works/TANF funding line in the program budget, parents must complete and sign forms related to the TANF designation at least once a year. In addition, as part of the quarterly visits with parents, Advocates have been requested to not only discuss student progress, as described above, against the IDP, but to also have the parent sign the form. The majority of the YAs view the need for quarterly signatures as intrusive, and interfering with the

relationship they have tried to establish with the parents. Many parents resist signing the forms (about two-thirds signed during the first quarter when this new policy went into effect this year), and YAs complain that it would be much more effective just to go over the IDP forms with the parents, without having to stop to obtain their signature.

Several YAs referenced comments by parents suggesting that "all you want is my signature; don't you ever come just to talk to me?" While some Advocates questioned why the IDPs even need to be shared with the parents each quarter, most were comfortable using the forms as a basis for helpful discussions with the parents, but objected to the signature, which they viewed as an inaccurate measure, a "façade," of parental involvement: "signatures don't translate to involvement." Ironically, *several speculated that the requirement for obtaining signatures so frequently may actually limit real parent participation by creating suspiciousness and a barrier to helpful relationships that could be avoided if a simple discussion could occur without the required signature.*

Approval of Program Termination

Before a student is terminated from the program (see Part Four discussion of the termination process), parents are contacted, typically several times, before the actual termination decision is made. Typically at least two letters are sent from the program to the parent indicating that their son or daughter has not been complying with the terms of the program agreement, and is not currently actively engaged in the program, and indicating that unless improvement occurs within a particular period of time, the student will be terminated. A final in-person or phone conversation is typically held, or at least attempted, with the parent before a final decision is made. Typically any request by the parent to provide the student with one more chance, and/or a promise by the parent to take certain actions to help rectify the situation, will result in a delay of the termination decision pending a further assessment of whether any significant change occurs in the student's behavior.

Parents as Partners

Each month the program sponsors a "Parents as Partners" meeting, to which all parents of HW-SC students are invited. Various informational presentations are made at the meetings, parents are informed of new developments or requirements within

the program, food is typically provided, child care is provided for parents, and opportunities are provided for parents to raise questions about the program. Transportation is offered to parents who need it to attend. Considerable effort on the part of several program staff goes into preparing for and attending these sessions, but the return on the investment is typically relatively small. Although a number of enthusiastic and interested parents attend each meeting, attendance rarely exceeds 25 to 35 parents, if that. In addition, various mailings are sent home to parents about various aspects of the program.

Overall Assessment of Parental Involvement

It is very difficult to provide an objective assessment of parental involvement in, or impact on, the program and its students. Focus group discussions with about 30 parents yielded mostly positive comments about the program, and considerable appreciation for the impact the program and particular Advocates were having in the lives of their sons and daughters. But those represented the views of parents who were committed enough to attend, and there is no way to know how representative their views were of the far greater numbers of parents who were not in attendance. Similarly, *parental signatures on IDP forms suggest that they met with their Advocates, but cannot attest to anything more than that.* And they may not even mean that, as in some cases a student may simply have had a parent sign the form without a parental visit. Thus the signature may mean far less than the actual opportunity to meet. *A meeting at least provides an opportunity for a direct connection to be made between the parent, YA and the status of the student in the program. Hopefully such discussions help provide the parent with information that s/he could use to provide ongoing support for the student's progress, but there is no way of independently proving any such direct impact.* Presumably, as long as substantial proportions of parents meet regularly to talk with YAs about the progress of their students, this is the best indication of parental involvement that can be realistically obtained.

In the future, HW-SC may wish simply to record the frequency of completed parental visits, as reported by the YAs, without requiring quarterly parental signatures, in an effort to stimulate more open conversations in the meetings without any concern about putting parents on the defensive about "one more signature." Perhaps an annual signature would be sufficient in the future.

PART FOUR: INTERNAL PROGRAM STRUCTURES AND PROCEDURES

As with Part Three, Part Four of the report is based primarily on the findings from the qualitative components of our evaluation, integrated with relevant implications from the quantitative analyses presented in Part Two. Descriptions of the various components of the evaluation have been provided elsewhere in the report.

The chapters which follow in Part Four address various issues related to the internal structures and operations of the Work-Scholarship Connection, based on what we heard about these issues. Throughout these chapters, we address issues in the context of how faithful the program in its current configuration is to the basic model design—i.e., the degree of fidelity between the model as designed and as actually being implemented. The premise is that the quality and consistency of services matters in shaping how well the program functions, and its outcomes.

We cannot independently verify how accurate most of the statements are, whether positive or not, as they represent perceptions and observations of those with whom we met. The perceptions may or may not be accurate, but accuracy aside, they appear to be perspectives that shape how people within the program are reacting to the program and how it is functioning at this point. In many cases, the perceptions in effect become the reality in that they reflect the attitudes and behaviors of staff who make up the program and who shape how it functions. It should also be noted that, for CGR to have included the observations and perceptions reflected in the following chapters, they had to have independently surfaced in comments from several individuals in different settings. That is, we have not included isolated comments or references to issues that we heard only from a single individual.

As indicated in CGR's original proposal, it is our hope and intention that the information gathered through our discussions and presented in the following chapters will be used in positive ways to help the program in its ongoing efforts to build on its strengths as it strives to continuously improve its operations and ts impact in the community.

18. RAPID GROWTH AND CHANGES IN HW-SC MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

As the bulk of this evaluation was underway, and during the time when our interviews and focus groups were conducted, the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection was organized as follows: As an affiliate of the Hillside Family of Agencies, the HW-SC was under the direction of an Executive Director. Reporting directly to the Executive Director were an Assistant Director; three Coordinators/Specialists (responsible for Program, Employment Development, and Seniors/Graduates); an Information Analyst; a Database/Systems Analyst; and a Secretary. Reporting to the Assistant Director were six Managers who in turn were responsible for 42 Youth Advocates. Also reporting to the Assistant Director were a Secretary and two Van Drivers.

Our discussion in the remaining chapters of Part Four is based on that 2002-03 administrative configuration. Some subsequent changes in the organizational structure have been made effective the beginning of the 2003-04 academic year, but those changes occurred too late to be addressed in the context of the evaluation.

As noted earlier in the report, the program grew dramatically in the past two years, both in numbers of students in the program and in the size of the staff needed to serve the students and the needs of the funders that drove the expansion. This chapter provides a brief overview of the organizational changes, the expressed rationale behind them, and problems or concerns that arose from the changes. This brief summary discussion of these changes is intended to provide a context for more detailed discussions of various operational issues in the remaining chapters of Part Four.

New Assistant Director and Two Specialist Positions

As the program expanded, an Assistant Director position was created. Two new specialist positions were also added to the program: the Employment Development Specialist and the Program Coordinator for Seniors and Graduates. These were in addition to a previously-existing specialist position, the Program Manager.

Rationale

With the rapid growth in the program, it became necessary to free the Executive Director from many of her day-to-day operational responsibilities, so she could be able to focus more of her attention on "big picture" issues such as strategic planning, funding, issues related to program expansion that needed attention, research oversight, best practices, and related issues. The Assistant Director took over responsibility for many of the operational aspects of the program, including various personnel and facilities management issues, and oversight of the Managers and the YAs under them.

In order to free up the Managers to spend most of their time hiring, supervising, training, coaching and supporting the YAs, and to create more focused attention on issues in need of specialized attention as the program grew, some of the training and employment and graduation preparation responsibilities previously overseen by the Managers and YAs were concentrated under the two new specialist positions. Considerable amounts of time were being spent on these functions by Managers, but in a decentralized fashion, and the program decided that more focused attention would need to be given to each function in order to keep pace with changes necessitated by the growth in the number of students in the program. At the same time, with the rapid expansion in the number of Youth Advocates, the program leadership also observed that that would place additional burdens on the Managers, so the specialists were added because they were perceived to be needed in their own right, but also because their additions were expected to free up Managers' time for more direct supervisory tasks.

Related Problems/ Concerns

Some of the related issues have already been discussed in more detail in previous chapters concerning the two new specialist positions. At the broader level, with both the Assistant Director and specialist positions, in part because of the rapid changes and the need to move people into the new positions without a lot of advance preparation, there was confusion among the staff concerning the specific roles of each position, and uncertainty as to who would be responsible for what tasks in the future.

There was not always a clear line of demarcation in responsibilities between the Executive Director and the Assistant Director, particularly since the specialist

positions reported to the former and the Managers to the latter, while some of the confusion concerning reshuffled responsibilities cut across those very positions. Similarly, working relationships needed to be worked out between the specialist positions and the Youth Advocates, and many of those relationships took time and needed to be developed on the run "without a playbook," without clear guidelines as to what the evolving relationships should ultimately look like and how they should function. The specialist positions were designed to provide support services for the YAs, but what support was being provided, and what the Advocates were supposed to give up and retain, were not always clear from the beginning. In some cases, YAs felt that more work was being created for them, rather than simplification of tasks. Some of these relationships are still being worked out, although they appear to be much clearer now, with less friction than a year ago.

Rapid Expansion of YA Positions

Within about a year, the number of Youth Advocates in the overall program (both Rochester and Syracuse) increased by 75%, from 24 to 42, in order to keep pace with the additional students in the program made possible by the additional funding.

Rationale

The core of the program, from the perspective of the provision of direct support services to the participating students, has always been the Youth Advocate position. Thus, as the program added students, it clearly needed to expand the number of YAs. The decision was made to retain the same ratio of about 30 students for every Advocate.

Related Problems/ Concerns

With the rapid growth in the program, additional YAs needed to be hired quickly, and perhaps less attention was given to the hiring process than would have been the case in a more relaxed, more static environment. Nonetheless, the program was able to hire YAs program officials considered to be of high quality who were able to "hit the ground running." *The related problem, however, was that the training of the new staff was somewhat chaotic, decentralized, and inconsistent*, as will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent chapter. Thus many of the new staff in effect received on-the-job training, without a lot of preparation for many of the tasks they were expected to perform effectively from Day One on the job, and without a clear sense of how they were supposed to handle certain types of situations.

In addition, some of the YAs, at the same time as they were learning about the new job, were also expected, with no experience, to build a caseload, with little opportunity to have observed other students previously in the program, and with little training or orientation concerning the criteria for admission, and the nuances of what to look for in the students being chosen to enter the program. It is likely that the twin factors of pressure to expand the program rapidly, and new Advocates having to build caseloads without previous experience or extensive training, contributed to the rapid increases in the numbers of entering students with low grade point averages, with consequences discussed earlier in the report.

Changes in Managers

In addition to adding a new Manager position, other shifts in positions meant that a total of three new Managers were hired and needed to be trained within a relatively short timeframe. The net increase of one new Manager position, at a time when 18 new YAs were being hired, meant that the Manager/YA ratio was changing.

Rationale

As the number of YAs was increasing, it was clear that more supervision would be needed. But as some of the responsibilities of the Managers were being reallocated to the new specialist positions, it was believed that the ratio of YAs to Managers could be increased. So, instead of roughly 5 YAs for each Manager, the new ratio expanded somewhat to 7:1.

Related Problems/ Concerns

As with the YAs, the need for hiring several Managers within a relatively short period of time affected both the hiring process and the amount of time available for training and orientation of the new Managers. And some of those previous Managers who might have been helpful in the training process and learning the nuances of the position were themselves learning new jobs, and therefore were less available than they might otherwise have been to provide help during the transition period. Meanwhile, *the new Managers, even as they were learning a new job, were at the same time having to provide immediate guidance, training and supervision to an equally inexperienced group of new YAs.*

Conclusions

In an ideal world, the transitions and rapid expansion of the program would have been accomplished at a slower and more manageable pace. The rapid growth clearly resulted in some strains, stresses, confusion, makeshift training, and "making it up on the fly" aspects of the

program that were less than ideal and that in some cases continue to have repercussions affecting W-SC, as discussed in other chapters. Ideally, the program growth would have been spread out over a longer period of time that would have allowed for a more manageable, carefully planned transition from a smaller, more intimate program to a larger, multi-site operation with increasingly decentralized, inconsistent procedures and practices across sites and Advocates. Moreover, added administrative burdens were placed on top program management, as well as on the Program Manager and clerical staff, who were suddenly inundated with substantial increases in new documentation and paperwork requirements that had not existed before.

Nonetheless, all of those realities notwithstanding, in some ways it is remarkable that the program was able to experience such rapid growth and absorb all the internal changes as well as it did. Even though the process was far less than ideal as a result of the pressures to expand so rapidly, the program managed to create in a short period of time a reconfigured infrastructure which, while imperfect and "somewhat ragged at the edges," nevertheless functions and has managed to absorb hundreds of new students in the program without imploding. The model is intact, and the infrastructure has proven itself resilient and flexible enough to remain in place and functioning to support it.

Now, hopefully, with the breathless period of change behind the HW-SC, with this evaluation and its findings before the program for consideration, and during a time when the program can take stock and make changes in anticipation of a next round of funding, the HW-SC can take a fresh look at where it is, and how it wants to rethink any of its internal policies, procedures and practices—and can do so at a less frantic pace than the one under which many of the current practices came into being.

19. YOUTH ADVOCATES AND THEIR MANAGERS

The HW-SC is centered primarily around the activities of the Youth Advocates. Their relationships over time with students appear to be <u>the</u> key factor in the program's success. They maintain the central relationships with all active HW-SC students, and drive most of the activities and services of the program. In addition to the activities they control directly, the YAs also interact routinely with each other, their Managers, the program specialists, and with clerical support staff. They also interact with school personnel and, for many students with jobs, with their mentors. *It is not unrealistic to say that the program revolves primarily around the Advocates and their wide range of interactions.* The student survey indicated that the meetings with YAs were felt to be by far the most helpful component of the program. Thus an understanding of the nature of the Advocate role, and of the supervisory role played by the Managers of the YAs, is essential to understanding how the program works and how it can be improved to better serve its students in the future.

> **The Youth Advocates are the core around which HW-SC revolves. The key relationships with students are integral to the program's success.**

Throughout our process of conducting interviews and focus groups, a number of issues were raised by, and about, YAs and their Managers that have implications for the overall program. Several of those issues are addressed in this chapter (other broader issues that cut across all aspects of the program, such as communications, accountability, paperwork, etc., are addressed in subsequent chapters).

YAs Reflect Student Racial/ Ethnic Profile

The HW-SC has been successful in its efforts to hire a YA workforce comparable to the profile of the students served by the program, as shown in the table below:

Students		Youth Advocates	
African American	75%	African American	73%
Hispanic/Latino	12%	Hispanic/Latino	12%
Caucasian	5%	Caucasian	14%
Other	8%	Other	1%

YA Role and Responsibilities

The YA role and range of responsibilities within the program, and specifically those targeted to their students, are at the same time both broad, comprehensive and explicitly laid out in the program's expectations (e.g., number of expected visits with students and parents, documentation of visits, etc.), while also, at least implicitly, leaving the YA with a great deal of flexibility concerning how the various tasks get accomplished.

The Youth Advocate is expected to provide support to an active caseload of about 30 students at any given time. Stated expectations of routine YA tasks include: weekly meetings with all students; meetings with parents at least quarterly, with monthly phone contacts; weekly student enrichment sessions; monthly worksite visits and weekly phone contacts with on-site mentors; and weekly updates of student progress notes. Beyond the formal requirements, the YA role was variously described by YAs and their Managers as including such functions as: counselor, advisor, parent, mentor, big brother/sister, disciplinarian, friend, clergy, cab driver, facilitator, role model, nag, conscience, mediator and resolver of conflicts, problem solver, and supporter—"and, increasingly, too much of a paper-pusher" (see discussion of paperwork in a subsequent chapter).

Advocates do counseling and case management, communicate with parents, and help mediate when students find they are unable to handle interpersonal struggles. Many Advocates said that they field calls from parents who are looking for advice and support. They explain, "The relationship, not the enrichments, is the most effective part of what we do. We deal with teachers, counselors and administrators, and the students trust us." Advocates believe it is their job to give their students the extra supports they need to succeed—at school, at work, and in life. All Advocates carry pagers and tell students that they are always available, though they try not to be overly accessible: "We set guidelines for the use of the pager, but kids still call all the time. Many of them have nothing going for them at home."

Over and over, YAs and Managers talked of the importance of developing strong relationships with the students, and of the level of trust between YA and student that is central to the YA's ability to be helpful to the student. But most also spoke of the importance of finding a balance between

the various roles, "since we can't in the final analysis be everything to these kids," and "since we can't solve all their problems and have to be careful not to make them too dependent on us."

Manager Role and Responsibilities

Managers in the past year or two have supervised an average of seven YAs, and thereby have broad oversight over program services provided to about 210 student participants at a time. Primary Manager roles and responsibilities were described as including the following: direct supervision, training and professional development of Advocates; customer satisfaction; data collection and monitoring; review of cases, especially as problems or issues arise that need special attention; encouraging; listening; suggesting; supporting; "enabling but not solving problems;" sharing successes and experiences across YAs; "advocating for the Advocates and their ideas;" leading; and setting guidelines and priorities.

As with the YAs, Managers currently have considerable flexibility in how they carry out their jobs.

Idiosyncratic Approach: Too Flexible?

> **Concerns were expressed by most that too much flexibility is undermining fidelity to the program, and that more consistent approaches need to be emphasized.**

Although nearly everyone agreed that the nature of the program is such that YAs and Managers should not be "carved out of the same mold" or be clones of each other, *most expressed at least some concerns that there may be too much flexibility allowed in how YAs and Managers carry out their tasks.* In earlier chapters of the report, reference has been made to the desire to create more consistency in how student enrichment sessions are provided, and in how job-readiness training and college preparation activities are carried out. These represent only some of the many areas in which YAs in the past have been able, and in some cases even encouraged, to use their individual idiosyncratic ideas, skills and interests to develop approaches tailored to the perceived needs of their students. And many agreed in our interviews that there continues to be considerable merit to encouraging such individualized approaches tailored to individualized needs. But *most suggested that the program has perhaps gone too far in this direction, and that greater degrees of consistency are needed in the future.*

Just as Advocates have flexibility in how they carry out the requirements of their job description, so also do Managers vary in how they supervise their Advocates. Advocates and Managers both reported wide variations on such issues as how supportive and open to suggestions

Managers are, their attention to detail, the degree to which they get involved in review of cases, the frequency and extent of supervision, the extent to which they solicit ideas from YAs, the extent to which they represent and argue on behalf of Advocate ideas in discussions with upper management of the program, etc. Managers' expectations for completing and submitting paperwork also reportedly vary significantly. Advocates would like more standardization in this and other processes. Advocates asserted that some Managers provide little direction, preferring to let YAs resolve problems on their own, unless they need specific advice, while others are "more on top of everything—they get us forms right away, give us all our percentages for GPAs and attendance, all listed by school." The Advocates indicated that such data are very useful because they "remind us what we should be doing and help us make decisions. But not all Managers do this."

While it is understandable that people have different management styles, and that there is no single approach to supervision of staff, there are nonetheless best management practices, and *it would be important for the program now to develop more consistent approaches and expectations around such issues as the extent of review of YA caseloads and progress against goals, regular meetings and staff supervision sessions, ways of holding staff and students accountable, etc.*

> **Most staff want more consistent supervisory approaches across the program.**

Many Advocates and Managers attribute some of the variation across YAs and Managers to rapid program expansion. As new people have been hired, it has been difficult to ensure that they receive consistent training and orientation or that they are fully apprised of job and program expectations since, in most cases, they needed to "hit the ground running" as they started their jobs.

Both YAs and Managers spoke highly of the "good staff of good will and caring" at both the supervisor and staff level within the program. But most Managers and YAs also noted the need for more effective and consistent systems approaches throughout the program, to "balance the present over-reliance on good will and the strengths of individuals in the program." Several particularly noted that it was perhaps easier to get by on the unique strengths and personalities of individuals when the program was smaller, but that *as the program grows, "it becomes more important to have consistent approaches and expectations of both Advocates and Managers in place, rather*

than placing so much emphasis on the instincts of individuals." Ideally these approaches should be developed based on national best practices, without having to "reinvent the wheel."

Training

> **More consistent training, both initial and in-service on an ongoing basis, is key to implementing more consistent approaches.**

One way to begin to provide more consistent, systemic approaches to services, activities and supervision of functions within the program is through the provision of more consistent training and the use of manuals spelling out standard practices and approaches for dealing with particular situations. In the recent past, particularly as the program has grown so rapidly, the provision of such consistent training, and the development of consistent approaches, have tended to take a back seat to just getting people in jobs and functioning the best way possible, even if it meant little consistency and much "seat of the pants, on-the-job training and figuring things out as we went along."

Training processes for Youth Advocates have been implemented with varying levels of consistency and seem to depend on timing, inclination and the motivation of both Managers and other Advocates. When YAs were asked about training they received when they joined the program, some told stories of being given the opportunity to shadow other Advocates but said that the only area in which they received consistent, extensive instruction about the program was related to completing paperwork. In the words of more than one Youth Advocate when asked about how they were prepared for their jobs, "Training? What training? We got trained in paperwork."

It is recognized that consistent training was difficult during the rapid program expansion period; nonetheless, even "veterans" of the program who arrived pre-expansion raised questions about the consistency and practical value of much of the training they received. Some aspects of the training were viewed positively, but overall, many concerns were expressed about, and many suggestions made for improving, the training for both YAs and Managers. Comments about the training are summarized below, as related by staff, in no particular order of prirority.

Training for YAs

Most of the comments focused on needs for improved training for Youth Advocates. Advocates were particularly candid about the types of training that they would have found helpful. Their comments and suggestions are summarized below:

❖ Advocates described most of their training as focusing on overall Hillside policies and procedures, HW-SC procedures and forms, and required paperwork, with "relatively little about what I really needed to know to do my job." They complained about learning "little of practical value" during the training, and *especially noted the lack of role playing or practical advice about how to address various "real world" situations faced on the job.* Several said they kept wondering during training if "anyone was ever going to tell me what I'm supposed to do."

❖ *More of the training needed to focus more explicitly "on what really matters— how we should deal effectively with the kids and their parents."*

❖ Advocates and Managers agreed that the YA training typically spent far too little time on such practical issues as how to work with teachers and other officials in their schools; the importance of enrichment sessions and practical advice about the content and ways of presenting the sessions to interest the students; what other community resources exist to help with enrichments and to make referrals for specific services a student might need; effective ways of working with employers and mentors; interactions and effective ways of working with Managers; ways of interacting effectively with students who are not highly motivated or heavily engaged in the program; and how to maintain relationships with parents "who may be part of the student's problem and who may be suspicious of outside intervention."

❖ Youth Advocates would have appreciated making initial home and recruiting visits with their Managers. This support would have been especially helpful when it came to knowing how to explain paperwork requested of parents, in particular the TANF forms. In the words of one Advocate, "I've had to learn to be creative in explaining the forms so I get the right information. Parents can get suspicious."

❖ Even the job shadowing, which most spoke highly of as a way of seeing how different people handled certain situations, was viewed by several Advocates as being "too much a function of who you were assigned to, and what was going on that day. Since everyone has different ways of approaching things, you might learn only one approach if you only followed one person." Some were assigned to shadow more than one person, but that was not true for all. Suggestions were made that shadowing and the opportunity to

actually do some hands-on activities in conjunction with several different Advocates or Managers could be helpful in providing a variety of helpful feedback and experiences involving different approaches to issues.

❖ Even though most people said that large amounts of time during training were devoted to paperwork issues, several YAs indicated that there was little practical advice concerning how to write up the individual case notes and progress reports, what to emphasize, in what level of detail, and how to use that information in the future. Also, how to make effective use of the Individual Development Plans, including how to develop realistic goals, and how to effectively monitor progress against those goals.

❖ The suggestion was made that the training should involve less reading of materials, or watching of videos, and more hands-on exercises that would help teach how to actually do various aspects of the job.

❖ There was not enough emphasis on how YAs are supposed to recruit and select students for the program, and on "how we assess whether they could benefit from the program, and especially under what circumstances we should admit someone outside the criteria for the program." At the other end of the spectrum, YAs and Managers indicated that there was little effective training concerning how and when to terminate someone from the program, and under what circumstances.

❖ Some suggested that it might make sense to spread the formal training out over a few weeks or even months, with opportunities to receive practical experience with a caseload followed by opportunities to return to training to discuss some of the practical experiences confronted on the job, and how they should be handled.

❖ Formal manuals were suggested by several Advocates, not just about Hillside and HW-SC personnel and related policies, but also including suggestions about community resources, enrichment sessions, suggestions for how to address different situations, etc. Such manuals could provide practical advice, and be updated periodically based on new experiences faced by those in the program.

❖ Training, as well as written manuals, should focus more on the relationship of YAs and Managers with the various program specialists, with attention given to the respective responsibilities of the different parties, the goals and expectations of each, and how the functions should complement each other, including possible role play examples of how certain scenarios should be resolved, with possible appropriate actions to be taken or statements made by each party in such circumstances.

❖ Suggestions were made to have both YAs and Managers receive more training concerning understanding the business community and their expectations, as well as better understandings of career opportunities. Such training could help the YAs be more effective in consultations with both students and mentors concerning job-related issues.

❖ Several people noted the exposure some from the program received to the Teen Outreach Program training a year or so ago, focused on youth development approaches with young people. Apparently a few from HW-SC attended, with the idea that they in turn would return to the program and train other staff, but apparently this hasn't happened, and some wondered why more effort hasn't been made to capitalize on that training investment by training others and transferring the knowledge gained throughout the staff.

Training for Managers   Suggestions for improving training for Managers were less frequent and less precise. They focused primarily on the following types of issues:

❖ *Managers who come in from outside the program, without having been Advocates before (about half of the Managers during the evaluation were in that situation), need to be exposed to some of the same types of training as YAs go through*, and some hands-on opportunities to experience what YAs experience, so they can more effectively supervise the Advocates.

❖ *Often individuals promoted to Manager positions have little if any previous experience in supervising people, and should receive specific training, both in advance and on an ongoing basis, in good supervisory skills and leadership training, as well as in good personnel practices.*

❖ More effective training is needed in how to do effective staff motivation and performance evaluation, staff development, and

holding students, YAs, and themselves as Managers accountable for their behavior and the impact the program has on its students.

❖ Several recommended that both Managers and YAs receive initial and/or ongoing training in effective time management, especially in a program such as HW-SC, where there is considerable flexibility and choices to be made in terms of how staff members choose to allocate their time, since their days typically have considerable unstructured time which needs to be used wisely. Such training apparently has been used in the program in the past to good effect, but may need to be updated periodically, especially as new people are hired and/or move into new positions.

YA Caseloads

Each Advocate is expected to carry a caseload of 30 students, which may vary somewhat from time to time depending on referrals, program terminations and graduations, but generally the numbers are expected to remain fairly consistently around 30 per Advocate. To ensure that their caseload is full, most Advocates maintain an unofficial "waiting list" of students who are interested in the program but cannot enroll, either because they do not meet GPA requirements or because the YA's caseload is full. Some "informal" services may actually be provided for "waiting list" students as a way of staying in touch with these students and helping to encourage them to improve their grades to become eligible to enter the program if openings occur.

Despite the norm of 30 students, YAs acknowledged that from time to time there can be significant variations from that expectation, with recent terminations in one case resulting in as few as 17 or 18 students near the end of the year, with little likelihood of new students entering until the following year, to caseloads as high as around 40 for another YA, due to such factors as siblings entering the program, picking up additional students to cover a staff vacancy, etc. Typically with so many cases, some are less active and need less attention than others, so at least for short periods of time, such a large number of students can be "managed" effectively.

Time Spent with Students

Advocates are expected to have contact with each of their students at least once a week. In most instances, that appears to be the reality. Advocates reported spending varying amounts of time with students. In some cases, they touch base with students in person

or through phone calls once a week. In other instances, they spend hours each week with some of their students. Students themselves indicated in the survey that most (about 80%) met with their Advocate at least weekly, with 13% every other week, and about 8% less frequently. Many of these meetings take place during the school day. In some schools, Advocates meet with students during non-core-class time. Other schools insist that Advocates meet with students before or after school or during lunch. In focus groups, parents reported that their children had very close relationships with their Youth Advocates. One mother admitted good-naturedly of the relationship, "They talk all the time. I'm jealous!" Similarly, a student explained that her Advocate had a close relationship with her parents and added, "She [my Advocate] comes over for dinner all the time. It's like she lived there."

Ideal Caseload Size   From the perspective of the program, 30 students is the ideal caseload size, and indeed is the number of students per Advocate that the program budget is designed to support. Some deviations from that are expected, but generally program officials become concerned if a caseload drops below 25 for any significant period of time.

Some YAs and Managers suggested that consideration should perhaps be given to changing the number of students per YA, depending on whether the YA maintains a caseload of middle school or high school students. At this point, YAs are based in individual middle or high schools (with one exception, each YA's entire caseload is within a specific school—a change from the earlier years of the program, when YAs split time between schools).[20] Thus, YAs now have either exclusively middle school or high school students, although this is beginning to change in 2003-04, based on the initiation of a grade reorganization plan to be implemented over the next few years whereby city schools will evolve from separate middle and high schools to integrated 7-12 facilities.

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[20] This change is universally viewed as having been a positive evolution within the program, as it is much easier for YAs to develop and maintain consistent relationships with students when they are all based in the same school facility.

Some YAs and Managers believe that at the middle school level, needed services for students in the program are less intense in nature, with high school students requiring more attention of a stressful nature around issues such as increasingly poor grades; becoming qualified for, and maintaining, jobs; keeping students motivated to even stay in school, let alone focus on preparation for college or post-graduation career opportunities. By contrast, middle school students on balance are continuing to perform reasonably well academically and, while they may need a lot of "attention, hugs and babysitting," the stresses of supporting and advocating on behalf of these students is viewed by some YAs and Managers as requiring less attention than for high school students. Thus some have suggested that perhaps the caseload size/student ratio should remain 30:1 for YAs responsible for middle school students, but be reduced to something like 25:1 for high school students.

Others disagreed with that analysis and suggested that the need for constant attention and handholding at the middle school level requires a higher investment of time among YAs at that level than with high school students—where even though the stresses may be greater, and intensive involvement may be needed at various times, students are also more independent and less likely to need constant attention such as in middle school. So a few YAs suggested that the ratio in the future should perhaps be split in the other direction—with 25:1 for middle school, 30:1 for high school.

On balance, however, most of those with whom we spoke were comfortable with keeping the middle and high school ratios the same, suggesting that there are no compelling reasons to change. This may be particularly true with the realization that with the grade reorganization being implemented over the next two to three years, more and more YAs may wind up with "mixed" caseloads in the future anyway, with mixtures of middle and high school students within the same school. Moreover, the reality is that some students require more intense services than others, regardless of whether they are in middle or high school. In fact, a more equitable basis for determining appropriate ratios may thus involve determination of those students with high numbers of at-risk factors and low GPAs, and adjusting caseload sizes accordingly, with smaller caseloads assigned to YAs with higher proportions of students with high risk

> **On balance, there are probably no compelling reasons at this point to change the student:YA ratio, though it should perhaps be reconsidered if high proportions of low-income, low-GPA students continue to enter the program in the future.**

factors. However, this may be impractical, as such profiles may be constantly changing as students leave and enter the program, meaning that the caseload sizes would theoretically need to be constantly adjusted across YAs.

Thus, from a practical perspective, there are probably reasons to leave the caseload size as is, especially in the absence of any compelling empirical data to suggest that the ratio should be changed for any groups of students. However, given the high number of low-GPA students in the program in recent years, some have suggested lowering the overall caseload size for all YAs from 30 to 25, if the budget would allow it, in order to make more intensive services available for students, and "perhaps be able to have a more positive impact on the GPA performance and ultimate graduation rates for the program."

Student Transition from Middle to High School

As shown throughout this report, the transition from middle school is a painful period for many HW-SC students. Many drop out of school before the end of the 9th grade. Others stay in school, but choose to leave HW-SC completely between the 8th and 9th grades, or leave at some point during the 9th grade, even when they have done well academically through middle school. The academic performance of those in the program consistently declines dramatically between 8th and 9th grades.

These unwelcome declines in outcomes coincide with internal shifts within the program, as *students comfortable with a particular YA in the middle school must make the transition to not only a new high school, but also a new Youth Advocate. In the past, that transition has not been managed particularly well by the program, and many students have fallen through the cracks.* In some cases, the new high school student literally never even met the new high school Advocate to whom he/she was assigned. Rarely did the "old and the new" Advocates come together with the student common to both to effect a transition, to exchange information, and to assure the student that s/he would have a new resource to advocate on his/her behalf in the new school. The program now understands that a more conscious effort is needed to effect a successful transition from one culture to another, and to help assure that the student will be comfortable in the new school environment.

Beginning with the entering 9th grade class in the fall of 2003, the program has developed a transition plan whereby specific

transition events were held during the previous summer, and whereby the student's middle school YA will spend time in the fall at the new high school working with the student and helping effect a smooth transition to the new Advocate. It is believed that this focused effort designed to help overcome the student's fears of entering a new environment will help reduce the recent declines in student performance between 8th and 9th grades. *Indeed, CGR believes that such an effort, with concentrated attention focused on the student by both the old and the new YAs, is essential as at least one strategy needed to overcome the dramatic declines in performance under the previous "no intervention transitions" that have occurred prior to this year.*

It is also hoped that the program will attempt to enlist the support of older HW-SC students who are succeeding in the program to help build bridges between new and returning students in the program as a further way of helping the incoming program students feel comfortable in the new school. Formal and informal ways of getting individuals and teams of older students who are supportive of the program together with the transitioning incoming students could be an additional way of providing support to the new students, and helping maintain their resolve to succeed in the new setting.

All of these approaches may become easier, or no longer even be necessary, as the CSD grade reorganization plan becomes fully implemented, as most students in the future will no longer need to change schools (though some will), and in some cases there may need to be no shift in the student's Advocate. And, to the extent that the Advocate does need to change, at least the "handoff" will be able to occur within the same school, where both the old and new YAs may both be present to assist in the transition process. The idea of using older students to help act as role models to younger students may become easier as well with all students within the same building.

How Advocates Keep Track of Student Progress

Among the records that Advocates keep on their students are Individual Development Plans (IDPs). Historically, Advocates have used these plans to review students' goals on a quarterly basis. Moreover, students were supposed to be consistently evaluated on the basis of their progress toward these goals but, as Advocates explained, "It hasn't been consistently enforced so we

> **The program is attempting to address the issue of improving the transition between middle and high schools. This is needed to improve overall future program outcomes.**

never did it as consistently as we should have. But now we have to do it for funders and have the additional responsibility of getting parent signatures." But aside from the parent signature issue, *the question remains: other than updating the goals each quarter, how well is progress against the goals tracked, not just for each student, but on a more systematic basis across the entire program, to see if patterns exist that might suggest corrective actions or new approaches that could be taken to improve program outcomes? Up to this point, the answer to that question seems to be that such information does not seem to be monitored routinely as a management tool* to suggest areas either of progress or of concerns that need to be addressed.

In addition to the quarterly IDPs, Advocates compile weekly Progress Reports on each student. Where IDPs allow for long-term goal setting, Progress Reports provide the opportunity for goal-setting in the short-term. Notes in Progress Reports are generally brief summaries and document the substance of an Advocate's conversation with students and may reference any concerns that were raised during the discussion. When report cards are issued, Advocates will document these in Progress Reports and note any successes (or struggles) that a student may have had in a given marking period. If an Advocate has had contact with teachers, that should also be noted in these Progress Reports.

YA Relationships with Managers

Managers are expected to meet individually with Advocates on a monthly basis to review files and to discuss concerns. In addition, each manager is expected to meet with his or her team of seven Advocates every month. *Advocates report that Managers carry out these supervisory responsibilities in different ways, but most Advocates agree that, as a group, they would like to see Managers meet and review cases more consistently, lead more effectively, hold YAs more accountable and worry less about building friendships and being liked and more about building an effective, professional team.* Other specific issues that were raised concerning YA/Manager relationships included the following:

❖ *YAs and Managers alike value the mix of YAs from middle schools and high schools on each Manager's team.* Typically each Manager's team of seven YAs includes Advocates from two or three different schools, at least one of which is a middle school and one a high school. The mixture of perspectives and experiences that are

thereby represented in team discussions can be very helpful to both the Manager and the different YAs, as they learn about issues through the exchange of ideas and observations, and can better anticipate problems and possible solutions for them as a result.

❖ It is precisely this helpful interchange of ideas that leads some YAs to be frustrated when such team meetings do not always occur on a regular basis. Some Managers hold team meetings regularly, with regular agendas, while others schedule such meetings more infrequently, "as needed."

❖ *Advocates on the whole expressed the desire to receive more routine guidance, guidelines, standards, support and accountability from their Managers.* More specifically, they requested from their Managers more regular input such as the following: more consistent guidance; formal guidelines; careful review of cases, including raising questions and offering suggestions concerning possible new approaches that might be tried with certain individual students or in dealing with particular types of issues; holding staff more accountable for improved performance; focus on team building; setting goals for the team and for individuals on the team; and monitoring progress against those goals. *The key for most YAs in their interactions with their Managers is to have more consistency in approaches across Managers, and especially from time to time within the same Manager.* As noted earlier, Advocates do not feel that such consistency is always present at the current time.

❖ Many of the Advocates expressed frustration that they don't believe their ideas are always taken seriously by their Managers, or by top management of the program. Several expressed the concern that many of the ideas discussed in team meetings do not seem to be raised in HW-SC management meetings, or at least they report that they rarely see evidence of responses to the concerns if they are raised.

❖ Some Managers were described as providing consistent, thoughtful reviews of each YA's caseload and progress from time to time, and offering helpful questions and suggestions concerning approaches that have been tried or should be considered in addressing issues concerning specific students or groups of students. Others were described as being much more laid-back, only responding to concerns about a student if a key decision point had arrived, or if the YA asked for advice. *The consensus among most YAs was that they*

> **YAs consistently requested more frequent interaction with their Managers, and more consistent approaches across Managers on a variety of issues of concern to the program.**

preferred the more formal review process, whereby they would receive the benefit of the Manager's advice and probing questions as an aid in the process of trying to provide the most effective help possible for each student.

❖ YAs expressed a preference to have all Managers be more frequent and more visible in their presence at their schools, so they could more readily observe conditions at the school, understand the environment in which each YA operates, intervene with school officials where necessary, and provide clear indications to school officials that the program is serious about making a difference in that school and devotes significant resources to it.

❖ Several Advocates expressed a concern that not all Managers have a consistent approach to the use of flex time when they need to make home visits in the evening, or wish to have office hours earlier in the day in order to catch more students before classes begin. Apparently different Managers send different signals to YAs as to how they should account for such time, and how it should be counted against regularly scheduled hours. A consistent policy is needed.

❖ The current ratio of 7 Advocates per Manager was viewed as reasonable by most YAs and Managers, though some of both expressed the view that the program could probably function just as well if the ratio were to change to 8:1 or even, in the view of some, to as much as 10:1. To assign more than 8 or 10 YAs to one Manager would be viewed by virtually everyone as a mistake.

Youth Advocates' Beliefs about Program Efficacy

Despite frustrations about internal procedures and patterns of communication, Youth Advocates and Managers remain committed to the program as a successful model. *This success, they explain, is attributable in large part to the personal connection that is established between Advocates and the students they serve: "The personal connection is what matters. If you buy into the person, then you'll accept what they offer. That part of the program is solid. These kids are starved for positive role models and we give them that."*

Advocates are also pragmatic, however, about the fact that many students join the program because of the promise of jobs and scholarships. They worry about the limited number of jobs available for students. They posit that their credibility with students is compromised when sufficient jobs are not available. Moreover, the gaps in employment opportunities for students—

or, conversely, insufficient employable students for employers—compromise the basic tenets of the program: "Without the job, the focus of the program changes. Then we're just another case management agency."

Conclusions

The core issue, as it relates to fidelity to the core concepts and design of the program model, is the need for more consistent approaches within the program, both as it affects YA roles and responsibilities, and Manager supervisory approaches.

20. HW-SC RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection has at least one Youth Advocate in each of the middle schools and high schools in the Rochester City School District. Advocates maintain offices in each school, albeit often sharing offices (with as many as three or four Advocates sharing the same office in one or two schools). Advocates have been able to establish effective working relationships with students in each of the schools, sometimes with full backing and enthusiastic support from building administration, sometimes with lukewarm support, and sometimes with an almost indifferent reaction from administration. But irrespective of the level of support from the top in each facility, *one of the program's clear successes has been its ability to be accepted into each school, and to have access on the premises to each school's program participants.*

Assuring School Support for HW-SC

With so many changes in the HW-SC and the CSD, high-level meetings should occur with school and program officials to address common issues.

In several of the schools, there is no question from year to year of the continuous support for the program. In other schools, especially those with new leadership from year to year, it may be necessary to re-establish or re-invigorate the level of support from the school administration. Given the recent rapid growth in HW-SC, the fact that more students with lower levels of academic achievement are entering the program each year, and the fact that Rochester schools are undergoing internal changes over this and the next few years as part of the grade reorganization plan, *it would seem to be especially important for high-level communications to occur this academic year between the program and the Principals and other top staff in each school. We suggest that the HW-SC Executive Director, and perhaps the President/CEO of Hillside, along with the Manager(s) responsible for liaison with each school, plan to visit each of the schools in which the program is operating*, to reiterate the value of the program and the program's desire to be a resource to the school, and to respond to any questions or issues the school may have.

Ideally some version of such a meeting (not always needing to involve the top levels of each organization) should occur at the beginning of each school year. Such meetings represent an opportunity to set an important tone for the academic year, along the lines of "We are here as your guest, but we also are a resource to you and your students and staff, and we want to be as helpful as possible. Here's how we can

be helpful to you, and here's how you can hopefully be helpful to us in enabling us to do our job on behalf of your students."

It is easy for a community-based program external to the School District, even one as well-established as the W-SC, to be taken for granted within a school—and to not receive the attention and support it deserves and needs to have to be successful—unless the program continually reminds the school of its presence and its value to the school and its students. Thus the value of re-establishing the relationship each year, and not just assuming that the support for the program will continue as in the past.

Ideally an introductory meeting would be followed up with additional meetings involving the Managers and Youth Advocates, who would make presentations to teachers and key administrative and student support staff within each school reminding them of how the program can help them, and how they can make referrals to the program.

Recruitment and Followup

Schools have very different approaches which the HW-SC must follow concerning recruiting and admitting students into the program. In one or two of the schools, students can only be recruited and admitted from lists of at-risk students identified by the school, and passed on to the program. Other schools allow representatives of the program to meet with teachers to invite their referrals and even to enter classes or homerooms to talk to students about the program. Others simply allow the YAs to recruit students on their own, with little or no active support from the school itself. *Ideally, in meetings each year with school officials, an approach could be worked out which allows the program to have some of the flexibility it desires for recruiting students, but balanced by a commitment on the part of the school to also help identify appropriate students.*

One of the important jobs of the Youth Advocates involves developing effective working relationships with teachers in each school. YAs admitted that that is not always easy to do, as some teachers are not particularly interested in cooperating with the program; some may feel defensive about having the program working with students who are not being successful in their classroom; and others may resent the program having access to resources to work with students when other services may be in the process of being cut or reorganized within the District itself. And

yet, it is the teachers who are among those who can most directly benefit from the program if it is able to successfully reach students in their classes and help motivate them to take the learning process and their academic performance more seriously.

But in some cases this means establishing a level of trust between the YAs and the teachers that can sometimes take time, and some of the YAs admit that they haven't always been willing to spend the necessary time to cultivate such relationships. This may be one area in which the Managers can also be helpful in conveying to school officials and teachers a sense of the value of the program, and that the only desire of the program is to help students and teachers, and that no one needs to feel threatened by this outside presence. That is*, the teacher is not being blamed for the student's poor performance in a class, but the student is being held accountable by the program for improving that performance, and hopefully both the teacher and YA have a vested interest in making that happen.*

Ideally, therefore, particularly in the context of academic problems experienced by many of the program's students, *YAs in the future would place more of an explicit focus on developing good working relationships with teachers in their schools, so that good two-way communications can occur.* That is, a relationship in which teachers will know whom to contact, and will feel free to contact a student's YA if the teacher believes the student needs help, and, conversely, that the YA can feel free to go to the teacher to discuss an academic problem and seek the teacher's advice and support as necessary. To that end, *it would probably make sense in the future in each school for a list to be distributed to all teachers and student support staff of all students in the school who are participants in the HW-SC, along with the name of each student's Youth Advocate, so contacts can be made directly with the YA when appropriate.*

Conclusions

In general, program working relationships with schools throughout the District have been good over the years, though there is considerable room for improvement, especially relating to selection of students into the program, and collaborative efforts between teachers and YAs to work cooperatively together in the students' best interests.

21. PROCESS OF TERMINATING STUDENTS FROM THE WORK-SCHOLARSHIP CONNECTION

Most students enter the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection program in middle school and if they follow program guidelines, are expected to continue as a program participant through the time they graduate from high school. Students may, however, be terminated (or "termed") from the program for failure to meet program requirements (in addition to those who leave the program because they drop out of school, move, transfer to another school district, etc.). Most students with whom we spoke were unaware of the fact that it was even possible to be dismissed from the HW-SC, and most said they did not know anyone who had ever been asked to leave the program.

In fact, student perceptions notwithstanding, program data suggest that, since 1996-97, an average of about 37 students a year have been terminated by the program for "non-compliance." Most of those students were terminated for failure to meet program expectations as outlined in the student contract, and/or for lack of commitment/noticeable effort to improve academic performance or school attendance (which is of course also related to the failure to meet contract expectations). *Typically, although the program officially terminates a student, the student has actually precipitated the decision by a pattern of actions (or lack of action).*

Advocates indicated that they see an increase in the number of students who make the decision to drop out of the program. In some cases, this is attributable to students who, in 9th grade and beyond, may get frustrated when they can't find a job. More often, however, YAs indicated that students leave the program when the level of expectations begins to increase in high school. As Advocates explained it, if the goal in high school is school completion and getting a job, those will often be difficult goals to meet in light of the risk factors that many students are facing. And, while there is the sense that middle school Advocates see part of their role as chasing down students and ensuring that they do what they're expected to, high school Advocates are more likely to expect students to take more responsibility on their own and are

less likely to track them down to get them to meet their responsibilities. Thus the combination of increased pressures and less direct "hand-holding" by Advocates is perceived as contributing to greater numbers of terminations.

Ambiguity/ Inconsistency of Termination Decisions

The broad grounds for terminating a student from the program are relatively clear. What seems far less clear, even to staff at all levels within the program, are the specifics of when to terminate a student, and the definition of exactly what constitutes "non-compliance," "failure to meet program expectations," and "lack of commitment" to academic performance. There is no question that prolonged patterns of low academic performance (i.e., GPAs below 2.0) and evidence of failure to attend student enrichment sessions or to meet with the YA would constitute reasons for dismissal from the program, but the question becomes how long must the prolonged periods be, and how is "lack of noticeable effort" defined? As with so many other aspects of the program, the answer is in the eye of the beholder, with considerable variation across Youth Advocates and across Managers. *The final decision whether or not to terminate a student ultimately comes down more to a case-by-case decision based on an assessment of individual circumstances rather than on any firm, or even implicit set of program criteria or guidelines.*

> **General grounds for terminating students seem relatively clear, but there is little consistency in how the guidelines are applied.**

Terminations as Last Resort

What does seem clear from conversations with staff is that the overall program philosophy, at least historically, has been that terminations should be a last resort, and the last possible option considered. The general rule has been that a student is given every chance to succeed before being terminated. Although some Managers and YAs are more prone to terminate sooner than others, even those most "willing to pull the trigger" tend to place the burden of proof on the program to demonstrate that more than a good faith effort has been made to make the program work in the interests of the student before ending the relationship. Questions are asked such as: Have we exhausted all possible approaches? Are there other ways of reaching the person? Has a good tutoring option been explored? Has the parent been engaged to help? Is there an additional incentive we should try? Should we wait one more report period? Typically the decision to finally terminate a person is made only after no more options suggest themselves.

The ultimate test of whether to keep working with a student or sever the ties with the program seems to come down to the

perceived level of effort of the student: *"Is s/he trying?" However imperfectly that question is answered, given the subjectivity of the answer, that seems to become the core determinant of whether to persist or terminate the relationship.* Even if a student has been failing academically for two or three marking periods, or even more, if the student appears to be trying, and is still engaged with the program and working to improve, the program may ultimately make the decision, at least for an additional period of time, to continue to try to find ways to help the student become successful, even if the odds are against a successful outcome. The program's implicit philosophy seems to be that as long as an honest effort is being put forth, the program may be able to help the student create some type of outcome that will be better than what would have occurred if the program simply gave up and severed the relationship (e.g., the program may be able to help the student stay on track to obtain a GED).

Process of Making Final Determinations

Before a final termination decision is made, several attempts have been made to contact the student and try to ascertain any level of determination to engage in efforts to improve, and at least two letters must have been sent to the parent(s) informing them of the imminent likelihood of termination unless a change in behavior occurs, and asking them if they have any information to counter that decision. In some cases, the parent will prevail on the program to give the student one more chance, and in some situations will offer to work with the student and the program to help reverse the recent behavior. In no case would a decision to terminate be made unilaterally by the program without first having made several attempts to engage both the student and the parent in a plan to change the student's behavior. Only after evidence that nothing is likely to change would the program ultimately decide to formally terminate the student. The decision would typically be made jointly by the Youth Advocate and the Manager.

Push to Terminate Sooner?

Mitigating against the emphasis on attempting to give every benefit of the doubt to each student is the fact that the longer a student stays in the program without a conscious effort to improve, the longer that person may be preventing another student on a YA's waiting list from being served by the program. To the extent that some staff in the HW-SC are more willing to consider terminating a student earlier than others, it tends to be for reasons along the lines of "We've done all we can for this student, but there are others out there that we should be

attempting to help with the same resources, since this student has had his/her chances, and now it's someone else's turn."

In contrast to the historical program view that a termination should be a last resort decision, some staff expressed the perspective that "gradually the program agenda is changing to emphasize making the decision to cut students loose more quickly if their GPA and attendance are too low, so our outcomes will look better." [21]   Those expressing this perspective suggest that, even if the agenda is changing, the emphasis is still on termination as a last resort, and only after a determination that the student is not interested and shows little or no inclination to engage in program activities.   The basic difference in *this more current interpretation of the termination guidelines appears to be one of timing: that there may be less official tolerance for multiple delays, and more emphasis on "pulling the plug" sooner*, rather than adding one more period of delay even when the odds suggest that the additional time will not yield any different behavior on the student's part.   This perspective suggests that, "rather than waste that time on someone with a low probability of success, we would be better off starting to work with a new student who is motivated to work with the program." YA and Manager estimates of the proportions of their caseloads who might be considered non-compliant and appropriate for consideration under a "more hard-nosed approach to termination" ranged between less than 10% to 10-15% to as much as 20-30%.

Future Implications

Despite the perceptions of some that the message concerning terminations is gradually changing within the program, many seemed unaware of any possible change in the agenda or the guidelines. *Clearly there is a need for a program-wide discussion of the philosophy underlying the assumptions about terminations, and about how and under what circumstances decisions to terminate should be made. Such a discussion should clearly consider the implications of any changes in the approach to terminations on the historic mission and philosophy of the program, as well as on the ability of the program to meet program targets/goals.*

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[21] Although it should be noted that any such decisions, while potentially increasing the end-of-year proportions of remaining students with higher GPAs and attendance rates, may also decrease program retention rates at the same time.

Future decisions about how to deal with terminations from the program should also consider two other larger questions: (1) If more students need to be terminated because of poor academic performance and attendance, is this because too many students were brought into the program initially below the program's eligibility requirements, and if so, should the flexibility of those criteria be reassessed? (2) Could the program avoid the need for many of these terminations if it could find a way to provide more effective academic supports to a higher proportion of students in the program? Answers to these key questions will have significant implications for how successful the program remains in the future.

Conclusions

Termination guidelines appear to be relatively clear, but how and when they are applied is not clear or consistent. The program needs to engage in a thoughtful discussion about termination decisions and how they should be applied, but that discussion should be held in the context of a larger discussion related to the types of issues referenced immediately above.

22. PERCEIVED PAPERWORK BURDENS

The burdens of paperwork and forms completion on staff of the HW-SC are perceived to have increased exponentially as the program has rapidly expanded. Not only has the agency as a whole had to process many more forms, simply as a result of the increased numbers of students in the program, but the specific types of information that now need to be collected for those increased numbers of students—and the additional forms needed to collect the new information—have also expanded.

Many Advocates expressed frustration about the way they feel their job has changed in recent years. In the past, they felt that their primary responsibility was to help students, to help them succeed at home and school. *With the program expansion through TANF monies, many Advocates feel that they now spend too much time on paperwork and documentation, at the expense of serving students' needs.*

Many YAs see paperwork as a necessary evil at best, and at worst as an impediment to doing their job. To those who balk at the increased paperwork resulting from increased funding opportunities, documenting what they do is last on the list of tasks to be accomplished. *And yet, most understand at some level that without appropriate documentation, information analysts cannot prepare reports that funders demand as part of the accountability that accompanies their support for the program.* Nonetheless, many resist the increased paperwork demands and believe they have not always been implemented as efficiently as they could have been.

To be sure, the paperwork/documentation load is significant. When students enter the program they complete a number of forms, most of which are overseen and processed by the Advocate. Every week, Advocates complete Progress Reports for each of their students. Every quarter, they complete an Individual Development Plan (IDP) on each of their students, which must be signed by both the student and the parent/guardian. As a result of Teen Works funding, all students older than 14 must be TANF certified. Again, this certification necessitates signatures from parents or guardians. Certifications must be updated annually.

As one Advocate explained, "The expansion of the program has given us more money so we can serve more people. That's great. But with more people, we have to show more accountability—IDPs, TANF, HIPAA, WIA—all the papers add up. It all means less time with the students. It gets frustrating for the kids—they need us and we're off at training for paperwork or in a meeting."

Program staff at all levels feel the pressure of this additional paperwork. Hillside staff explained that one of the challenges facing them as a result of program expansion and the added documentation burdens is the need to establish systems that enable staff to maintain data as efficiently as possible, and to translate it as effectively as possible into reports that can serve as management tools to help make better decisions about the future of the program.

The more detailed comments concerning paperwork and documentation focused around several broad themes, within which both frustrations and practical suggestions emerged from staff comments:

Clarify Purposes of Required Forms

Several comments indicated that too often requests or demands were made by program administrators for particular types of information without adequately explaining the rationale behind the requests. Several staff acknowledged that they understood why funders required certain forms to be completed, but even many of those said *it was rarely made clear how the information would be used, or why it needed to be collected in specific ways, or why "everything needed to be completed within tight time frames with little advance notice."*

Several persons described the desires to focus on direct services vs. the need to spend more time on documentation as what one person described as the "clash of two different worlds: those of us concerned about providing direct support and services vs. the administration/finance/monitoring world requiring maximum documentation of everything." *Several added that it wasn't that there wasn't room or even the need for both worlds to coexist, but that there was too little communication of respective needs between the two worlds.*

A number of comments also reflected on the fact that staff rarely see the results of how the forms they complete and data they compile are used. Thus *they understand the burden imposed by the*

requested information, but rarely are helped to understand the information's value and how it is used. "And, if the value can't be explained or shown to us, maybe it raises questions about whether the information is really that useful, at least in the way it is presently collected and used."

Several suggestions were offered by various staff members in response to these types of comments, including:

❖ Communicate clearly to staff how the information being requested or required will be used, and by whom: *"Tell us how we as a program will benefit."* The consensus among staff was that little is typically done to motivate them to complete the needed forms, and that if the value of the information was communicated more directly, they would more readily complete the forms "with a lot less complaining."

❖ *Better yet, "Show us the results of any information that we collect, so we can help management discuss the implications and offer observations concerning any future changes that might be suggested by the information."*

❖ Routinely provide staff with copies of any reports that go to funders based on the data that are collected.

Management should share reports and other results of information, and seek feedback from staff.

❖ Ask staff for their suggestions as to the value of, and possible uses for, information that is collected. "Even if we don't understand the stated purpose of collecting certain information, we might be able to think of other ways the data could be used that would benefit the program, that might go beyond the original anticipated need for the information."

Link IDPs and Progress Reports

Several Advocates complained about the need to update the Individual Development Plans quarterly, with some saying "not that much changes in three months." Others questioned the value of completing weekly Progress Reports on each of their students, although others realized the value of forcing the discipline of reporting weekly, "as it forces us to make the contacts each week and to focus on whether progress is being made by the students."

But even those who clearly understand the need for the weekly reporting (most of the YAs do) question how it is used at the management level. Several questioned whether the Reports are systematically reviewed on a consistent basis by their Managers (though others acknowledged that some Managers review them

with the YAs on a regular basis). *They questioned whether anyone reviews the Progress Reports for "trends or big picture patterns that might suggest some things that we should be doing differently."*

And most of those who understood the value of completing the student IDPs on a quarterly basis wondered why it was necessary to have parents have to sign the forms each quarter. Since "most don't change that much every quarter anyway," several suggested that maybe the forms only need to be signed by parents twice a year or even annually, and/or only if significant changes are made in the goals.

Other comments suggested that the Progress Reports might be more useful if they were consciously linked more consistently to the stated goals in the IDPs. It appears as if some YAs and Managers attempt to make those linkages in some cases, but this does not seem to be a consistent practice.

Based on those types of comments, the following types of suggestions were offered by staff:

❖ Clarify the purpose of the Progress Reports, and how they are used by management.

❖ *Link the Progress Reports more explicitly to the IDPs, so that comments about student activities and progress are linked regularly to how they contribute to efforts to address their IDP goals.*

❖ *Hold Managers accountable for reviewing the Progress Reports periodically and discussing them with individual YAs and in team meetings with all their YAs.*

❖ Perhaps have Managers organize the Progress Report notes into several key themes that could be shared with YAs, and with other Managers and administrative staff in the HW-SC management meetings, with the purpose of discussing any themes or "cross-cutting issues that seem to be emerging that we should be addressing as a team or as the entire program."

❖ *Do quarterly accountings across the program of progress against the IDPs, "so we can assess the proportion of students and goals against which progress has been made, and in what proportion of cases no progress has been apparent."* "Use this type of quarterly update to help us understand how the data can be used, not just for holding individual students

The program should make better management and evaluative use of Progress Reports and IDPs.

accountable for progress against their goals, but *also to see if there are overall areas or types of issues that we're doing well on, and others where as a program we need to do things differently.*"

Better Manage the Flow of Requests for Information

Perhaps the most frequent concern expressed about the "deluge of paperwork requests," other than the sheer amount of it, had to do with the perception that the information "was always requested immediately, with little advance notice, and in an emergency or crisis mode, as if it was needed yesterday." The prevailing perception seems to be that there were repeated requests for information, one after the other, with short deadlines for obtaining the information, with little differentiation of priorities ("they all seemed to be equally important, and all seemed to need immediate attention").

However, it is important to put some of the concerns we heard in context. Most of the individual and focus group interviews conducted as part of this study were carried out at perhaps a peak time when completion of various data and forms was being emphasized by program administration. This was at a time when the quarterly parental signings of the IDPs were still in the relatively early stages. There was also a flurry of activity to obtain retroactive forms required by the TANF grants. Forms needed to be completed by many parents whose students had been in the program prior to the advent of TANF funding, so there was a concerted effort to obtain those completed forms on a retroactive basis to meet funder requirements. In reality, such a concentrated focus is not likely to be repeated, as in the future the required forms will be completed as students enter the program, except for annual updates which should be able to be staggered based on anniversary dates such that they will not create the type of burden that occurred earlier this year.

The major recommendations that were offered by staff for managing flow of requests in the future may happen simply as a matter of course, based on the more routine flow of information that should occur in the future:

❖ *In the future, as new requests for forms or types of information are made, make sure that they are announced well in advance* so Advocates and any other affected staff can plan for them in advance, "and make sure the time frame for collecting the information is adequate to assure

that we can fit it into our regular activities efficiently, so we don't have to drop everything else to get the forms collected."

❖ Consider just sharing and reviewing the IDPs with parents each quarter, but without forcing them to sign them each time. "Just give them a chance to review them regularly, but only ask them to sign the forms once or twice a year, or when major changes are added to the goals."

Complete Required Information Electronically

Most of those we interviewed suggested that more of the forms and requested information should be routinely collected electronically, rather than in written/manual formats. This is routine now with some YAs, and some Managers routinely request information to be submitted that way, but apparently this is not consistent across YAs or Managers. *Several Managers and YAs alike indicated that computerized entry of materials, including Progress Reports, should be required, rather than just suggested.* The ability to easily do some of the analysis of Reports, IDPs and other information, as suggested above, would be significantly enhanced if manual reports were minimized over time, with all such reports as of some specified date to be filed electronically.

One of the major impediments to such an approach up to this point has been the fact that this has not been possible in every school. Some of the schools in which YAs are based do not have Internet access, thereby limiting internal email communications across all segments of the program, and placing logistical limits on the ability to require computerized filing of information. It is not known how easily this issue can be resolved, but staff agreed that it needs to be given priority attention in discussions with officials in the affected schools.

The following suggestions grew logically from the above comments:

❖ *To the extent possible, all required reports, and especially things like the Progress Reports, IDPs and any others that need to be done routinely, should be required to be completed electronically*, both for ease and consistency of entry, but also to make it easier to analyze and track trends in the data. Ideally, such a requirement should be in place as of a specific date, announced well in advance, so staff could make necessary arrangements in anticipation of the change.

❖ *Discussions should begin with appropriate officials in those schools in which program staff do not have Internet access, to determine if such access can be obtained in the near future.*

Simplify Data Requests and Processes

In addition to computerizing as much requested ongoing information as possible, staff raised other issues around simplifying requests for data. They expressed concerns about simplifying forms, making sure that what is asked on the forms is clearly stated and gets at what is needed and valuable from a management and evaluative perspective, limiting duplications of requests, etc. Some steps have clearly already been taken to address some of the issues raised in this chapter, and staff made suggestions to build on those efforts, including:

❖ Continue efforts through the Quality Assurance Improvement Team process and an ad hoc Forms Committee to find ways of minimizing paperwork-related burdens, by reducing numbers of forms, simplifying those that must continue to be used, consolidating forms where possible, standardizing and simplifying approaches where possible, etc.

❖ "Ask staff for any suggestions about the best way to implement any new requests for data, and give us as much lead time as possible."

❖ *Discuss with funders any potential opportunities, while continuing to meet their legitimate needs for information, to consolidate and simplify the forms, and perhaps reduce the frequency of reporting currently required by each.*

23. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

As Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection has grown rapidly, the relatively small, intimate program staff also grew rapidly to accommodate the increases in students admitted to the program. In the process, effective internal communications have suffered, in the view of most of those we interviewed. *As viewed by most staff, the rapid expansion—along with its advantages of greater resources and the resulting ability to serve more students—came with some prices, one of which was a reduction in perceived effectiveness of communications across all levels of the program.*

Some specific issues have been addressed in earlier chapters concerning communications within and between such groups as the Youth Advocates, Managers, program specialists, and the program's management team. Those discussions focused on both verbal and written communications issues involving those various subgroups within the program.

But beyond such specific issues, a number of broader communications issues were raised in virtually all of our discussions with staff at all levels within the program. Those issues transcended specific groups, and were viewed as affecting the entire organization and its ability to function well and work well together. The issues related broadly to two-way communications and accessibility, trust and respect, and openness to ideas and criticism.

Many detailed examples of effective and ineffective communications were shared in our confidential interviews and focus group discussions, but such details are not appropriate to share in this report, and indeed cannot be shared without violating the promises of confidentiality which we made to all who spoke with us in a spirit of openness and candor. But the essence of those comments is reflected in the summary reflections which follow. They are presented in no particular order of priority, and without independent verification of the degree to which the comments are accurate and reliable. They represent perceptions which may or may not reflect factual reality. But as noted earlier in the report, these perceptions have the effect of reality for many

in the program and, by virtue of the frequency with which we heard them in multiple independent confidential discussions, clearly represent pervasive views of significant numbers of staff across all levels within the organization.

Two-Way Communications

The types of comments voiced consistently in our discussions can be summarized as follows:

❖ *"We've done some great things through the program and its rapid expansion, and the leadership to pull it all off has been amazing. But one of the casualties in the growth process has been the ability to think and talk things through carefully."* There is a pervasive impression that too often in the past couple years important issues have just fallen through the cracks without adequate discussion. The perception is that the program has gotten so big so quickly, and the demands on everyone's time are so great, that "we've lost the ability to carefully consider issues and talk through their consequences. There's little real in-depth communication across the different levels of the program at this point."

❖ Many staff spoke of their frustrations at having expressed ideas and made suggestions to superiors that "simply fell through the cracks. You never knew what happened to them, or if they ever even got considered, but they just sort of disappeared." "Things get talked about and then lost. After a while, when we make suggestions and see nothing happen, and see reasonable ideas being ignored, we give up."

❖ In the same vein, many staff spoke of leaving messages for other staff, making suggestions, and asking for the opportunity to sit down to discuss specific ideas or concerns, and never receiving a response to the requests.

❖ *"We don't have a very good way at this point of talking through ideas for change. It's like we've gotten too big to be able to really consider issues effectively across the program.* About the best that can sometimes happen is we can have two-way open discussions at the team level (Managers with their YAs), and sometimes good things come out of those discussions. But some of those ideas would also make sense to share and implement across teams, but that never seems to happen, as there doesn't seem to be much evidence that the ideas get communicated beyond the team level. If they do, we don't see the results."

❖ While some Advocates maintain that they feel quite comfortable going directly to upper-level management, others reported that they feel intimidated and will speak only to their Managers about concerns, if they speak at all. And some expressed the concern that even if they do raise an issue with their Manager, often that is the last they will hear about it, unless they keep bringing it up.

❖ *Often staff reported that many things get sprung on them at the last minute*, or decisions are simply announced that have widespread impact on many people, but "without any opportunity to have participated in any discussions about the issue, or without any opportunity to react publicly to the decisions, and without any opportunity to have the decision reconsidered, even if there might be valid reasons to do so."

❖ Advocates in particular, but with some independent confirmation from others as well, expressed the view that the management team—including top management, the Managers and the Specialists/Coordinators—are "somewhat of a closed loop, with little information coming from them unless it is a final decision, and little indication that they consider ideas from below. They mostly act like an insular group when they meet together, and don't often convey what they're thinking or invite any reactions from the rest of staff to any ideas they might be thinking about."

A clear need was expressed throughout the organization for more effective 2-way communications and openness to discussion of ideas and new approaches.

❖ *Several staff expressed the hope that once this evaluation is completed, it will be widely distributed throughout the program staff, and that it will provide the basis for staff to focus on various issues in an objective, open manner*, either in full staff meetings or through special committees that are set up that involve cross-sections of staff that can process the recommendations and consider how the program should respond to them. The expressed hope was that broad input would be sought from staff about the report and its recommendations, and that decisions made in response would be finalized only after a process that involves input solicited and discussed across all levels of program staff.

Trust and Mutual Respect

❖ *A number of staff expressed the concern that too often some issues cannot be raised in discussions, because they will not be kept in confidence, thereby limiting the ability to have honest discussions about issues of importance to the program.*

❖ Several expressed the concern that the team approach "that used to characterize the program, with a 'one big family' approach to

everything, has now broken down. We still talk as if we're one big happy family, but now too often we don't listen to each other, and there's way too much finger-pointing instead of saying that we're all in this together and we need to find common solutions to issues that get raised. *We need to act more like a team again, because this program is too good to risk compromising it, and we need to be working on ways of making it better together.*"

<div style="border: 2px solid #7a1f2b; padding: 10px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-style: italic;">
Concerns were expressed about the need to regain mutual trust and respect across staff.
</div>

❖ "We may have lost some of the trust and mutual respect for each other that we had before we grew so fast. It's like we had to bring so many people on so fast, and had to make so many decisions about changing the program, and adding new procedures, that we forgot how to talk to each other, and forgot that we all have good ideas, because there wasn't time to process them in the rush to expand. *Hopefully now we can take the time to get back to restoring the levels of trust and mutual respect that we used to have, and that we need to regain, so we can move forward to meet the program's core objectives that we all still care about.*"

Openness to New Ideas and Criticism

Related to some of the issues noted above were specific concerns about perceived resistance to those who offer constructive criticism of aspects of the program, or who raise questions about new directions or proposals.

❖ "We're an intelligent staff, and we're all here because we care very much about this program and the kids we're serving. So our views should be taken seriously when we raise questions or make suggestions. Instead, too often we get accused of undermining the program if we say anything outside the 'party line'." Others who agreed with that perspective added that they thought some of those perceptions were attributable to the time when decisions during the program's expansion were perceived to have been made without a lot of discussion across all staff levels, and that those patterns may have inadvertently become more institutionalized than intended. *Those staff expressing those views believe that it is possible to return to a more open process of inviting different perspectives and making people feel welcome in expressing such alternative views.*

❖ Others, however, expressed the concern that too often the simple act of raising a question about a proposed approach or existing procedure is viewed as a personal attack, or a sign of disrespect, rather than as a simple professional discussion or an honest expression of a different perspective that should be considered

with respect. Thus some staff have become reluctant to raise any questions about program directions or decisions. Several staff at different levels of the organization said variations of the following comment: *"It's hard to know how to respond to issues because in effect the signals we get at all levels are that it's better to just go along and not raise questions and don't make waves."*

❖ With all this going on, the perception is that as the program has grown, there hasn't been much emphasis on, or real time for, team building among staff. The hope expressed by several of those we interviewed is that there will be more time to emphasize this in the future, perhaps focusing on specific issues facing the program in the process.

Conclusions

Clearly there is considerable frustration with the current perception of communications throughout the program. Frustrations were expressed by most of those we talked with, at all levels of the organization. The frustrations were in many cases personal, but for the most part were borne out of wanting to improve the program. *Virtually without exception, even those expressing the most concerns with internal communications did so in the context of strong support for the program, which was viewed as "absolutely needed and on the right track in what it is doing with these kids."* There is a strong commitment to the program, and a strong belief that it is making a positive difference in the lives of those it serves.

But there is an equally strong belief among most staff that HW-SC can be even more effective in the future, and that in order for that to happen, there needs to be better sharing of ideas between staff, and a greater willingness to learn from each other by sharing practices that seem to work, and also raising questions about, and perhaps changing, practices that may not be working so well. Most staff were optimistic that the program can return to that degree of openness and sharing of ideas, and expressed the belief that the program would be more effective with even more students in the future as a result.

24. ACCOUNTABILITY

In interviews and focus group discussions with staff at all levels within the HW-SC organization, a number of issues related to accountability were raised consistently—including the need for greater accountability of students, of all levels of staff, and of the overall program to its funders. Nearly all of the comments focused on the need to strengthen accountability throughout the program through a variety of emphases, policies and practices.

As throughout Part Four of the report, this chapter focuses on perceptions and observations as relayed to CGR in multiple discussions. Although we cannot independently verify the accuracy of each of the comments raised below, the consistency with which these issues were raised, coupled with our own observations of various aspects of the program, suggest that the comments and suggestions that follow provide an accurate reflection of the levels of accountability that currently exist within the program.

Lack of Clearly Defined Expectations

Although the mission and goals of HW-SC seem clearly defined, most staff at all levels within the program raised a number of questions about how the mission and goals get translated into specific expectations of performance levels and expected tasks and activities to be carried out by people in different positions within the organization. *Among the most frequently-raised questions about accountability were those related to uncertainties as to who is responsible for what activities and functions within the organization.*

Such questions were particularly frequent in the context of staff uncertainties about the roles of the various specialist/coordinator positions within the staff, and how those positions are supposed to relate to each other, to upper level management of the program, to Youth Advocates, and to their Managers. Many of the related issues have been addressed earlier in the report. Most of those interviewed understand the nature of the specialist positions and what they were designed to do, but *considerable confusion remains among many staff as to how what the specialists do complements, and is complemented by, the responsibilities of Youth Advocates and Managers, in particular.* There clearly is overlap between the various functions— much of it planned, intentional and necessary—but who is

ultimately accountable for what functions at the margin where the positions intersect is still not always clear. As a result, either important tasks at times fall through the cracks, or unnecessary duplication of tasks occurs, leading to inefficient use of staff time.

Expectations as to how various types of activities and responsibilities of Youth Advocates should be carried out have also not always been clearly spelled out, either in practice or from the beginning in training. This concern relates to the extent to which flexibility has been encouraged throughout the organization in dealing with students, family members, school officials, Managers, enrichment sessions, forms, etc. But earlier chapters of the report have noted the need for more standard, consistent practices and expectations within which the individual personalities and skills of the staff can flourish. *Most staff urged that greater emphasis be placed in the future on creating clearer expectations and guidelines concerning how certain tasks and functions are to be performed, and clarifying who is responsible for carrying out specific functions.*

All of this relates, in the minds of many staff members, to the need to both lay out clear expectations and responsibility for carrying out various functions, but also to *hold the appropriate people accountable when the specified functions and tasks are not carried out. As several people said, there need to be clearer consequences.* When policies or expectations are articulated but not enforced, those in the organization begin to lose confidence in the systems and policies they feel they should be working to implement. Breakdowns in accountability may be at least in part a function of the rapid growth that the HW-SC experienced, but even if there is such a logical explanation, *staff believe there is now a need for deliberate efforts to create clear expectations and to model and enforce accountability in many ways throughout the program.*

Lack of Consistent Review of Outcomes

In many ways the HW-SC has been ahead of most non-profit organizations in the value it has placed on data to help monitor program impact and to help shape management decisions. As noted above, the program collects voluminous amounts of data. It has staff members devoted exclusively to collecting, inputting and managing the data; creates task forces and special work groups that use data to help shape their recommendations for needed changes in the program; and

has an Executive Director who understands the value of information as a management tool.

However, it is also true that not all of the information collected by the program is used as well as it could be to monitor program performance and to shape needed changes in program approaches. In some cases, data need to be organized and broken out more appropriately, such as in how some of the key outcome measures discussed in the earlier data analysis chapters are presented. Beyond that, the program has discussed, but not yet determined the best ways of using, a variety of information collected on each student as means of tracking performance of both individual students, Youth Advocates, and Managers.

For example, a wide variety of information is available on each student in the program concerning: at-risk characteristics at program admission; GPA, attendance and suspension data prior to admission; subsequent detailed weekly Progress Reports; quarterly Individual Development Plans with goals specified and monitored over time; information on job readiness; information on jobs sought and obtained; etc. Much of this information is updated on a periodic basis, including changes in job-readiness training and job status, as well as updated information each school reporting period from the School District concerning grades, attendance and suspensions. And yet, as suggested in the chapter on paperwork and documentation, *little of this information gets linked together to determine patterns of progress (or lack thereof), and what might be contributing to the presence or absence of progress, both at the individual student level, as well as across Youth Advocates, Managers, schools, younger vs. older students*, etc. As more of the information maintained by YAs becomes more consistently computerized, the ability to link these different data resources will be enhanced.

With more effective linkages of these different data elements, maintained in great detail by the program, it should become possible for the program to more effectively monitor progress of individual students, and to determine where corrective actions are needed if a student is failing to meet stated goals. Perhaps even more importantly, it should become possible to discern cross-program patterns, building on some of the findings from this evaluation and tracking them forward in the future, *to determine types of approaches that appear to be working well for certain types of students, what*

might need to be replicated with other students, and what might need to be modified for future use.

The intent of such integrated use of existing data is not to be punitive in evaluating individual students, YAs or Managers, but to use the wealth of data that the program has wisely collected over time to spot trends, to determine approaches or types of interventions that appear to be working or not working, to determine characteristics of students and their histories that appear to contribute to success within the program, and to learn on a regular basis from these periodic reviews of the data what approaches should be adopted as best practices within the program, and where new initiatives may be needed to improve outcomes with certain types of students. Such more formal tracking of outcomes, program activities and descriptive characteristics of students can ultimately be very helpful to the program in defining areas where change is needed, and to ultimately help improve the program's overall success rates.

> **HW-SC needs to make better use of its data to spot trends and create improved approaches across the program.**

Consistent Expectations of Consequences

With more effective use of the program's myriad of data on each student and Advocate, students can more effectively be held accountable for their performance while in the program, and can more effectively be held accountable for the actions they have or have not taken to meet their IDP goals. For example, students have specified expectations concerning such things as attendance at enrichment sessions, community service obligations, meetings with YAs, grades, attendance, etc. But for the most part, students who fail to attend enrichment sessions or do not make contact with the Advocates regularly are rarely held accountable, unless the patterns become especially egregious over a prolonged period of time.

YAs and their Managers in turn can be held accountable for the overall performance of their students, and for using the data to look for patterns that may suggest why certain goals have or have not been met and/or to suggest certain strategies that may need to be tried before terminating a student. *Again, the point of the data and of the setting of consistent expectations is not to penalize students or staff for lagging outcome measures, but to use the information to spark corrective actions. The importance of the data should be to help understand what is or is not working, and why, and to enable appropriate corrective actions to be taken,*

rather than to be punitive. Certainly consequences need to be part of the process. But the *consequences should be related more to the failure to act on the information, rather than on the outcomes alone.*

That is, if a Youth Advocate, for example, consistently has a caseload with a high proportion of students with low GPAs or with few job placements, this should not automatically mean the YA is not doing his/her job effectively. But it should be a red flag to examine underlying reasons for the low performance levels. If, for example, a student entered the program with low GPAs to begin with, subsequent low levels of performance may be expected, and may only be corrected with concerted additional academic supports. YAs with caseloads with high proportions of students without jobs should be working with the Employment Development Specialist to determine what can be done to improve the chances of more of the students obtaining jobs in the future. Managers noting consistent patterns across students with the same YA, or seeing patterns across a team of YAs, should be offering suggestions concerning corrective actions that may get at underlying concerns.

Failure to address such patterns, or to attempt various corrective strategies, should indeed have consequences in terms of staff performance reviews (see below)—and, in the case of students, may have the consequence of termination from the program. At the present time, decisions about whom to terminate and under what circumstances are made with little consistency across YAs and Managers. *Using the program's data more effectively to link across various outcome measures, indicators of program services provided, and student characteristics should enable such decisions to be made on a more rational basis in the future.*

Staff Development and Performance Appraisal

In an employee satisfaction survey of HW-SC staff conducted by Hillside about a year ago, one major exception to mostly positive findings was that by far the lowest level of satisfaction with a series of personal work environment issues was with the annual performance evaluation process. The survey responses were borne out in comments made in our interviews and focus group discussions. *Most staff felt that the process in place now is not fair, is not linked to clearly defined standards of performance, and is administered by staff who themselves are applying "widely variant" standards to review those who*

report to them. Without clear agreed-upon definitions of the categories on which the evaluations are based, and without clear expectations of what constitutes acceptable, unacceptable and exceptional behavior and performance under the various categories, the process will continue to be perceived as "unfair and unclear."

Most of those who commented on this issue were concerned that the process should not be based on just noting what proportions of students have low GPAs, or fail to graduate, or are terminated from the program, etc., although most staff understand that those are certainly factors that should be considered. But they were concerned that the process should also factor in extenuating circumstances beyond an Advocate's or Manager's control if a YA, for example, inherits a caseload with a number of poor students to begin with. But *with more effective use of the program data on each student, as discussed above, the focus of the performance appraisal system should be not just on tracking such overall measures, but on what level of progress was made over time, what new initiatives were undertaken to address problems, etc.*

The primary focus of an effective performance appraisal system should be its emphasis on staff development, with the establishment by the staff members and supervisor of annual goals and issues to work on during the year, specified processes and resources for addressing the goals, and formal monitoring of progress against the goals.

The primary focus of the performance appraisal process should be on the development of each person's strengths and ability to help make the program more successful. The focus should be on personal accountability, and on helping each person to take responsibility for growth and personal improvement, in a shared effort between the employee and his/her supervisor.

Strategic Planning

One of the concerns expressed by staff in our discussions is the perception that too often decisions have been made in the past, and shared after the fact with staff, without the appearance of careful thought and advanced planning. It is recognized that many of these decisions had to be made on a rapid, short-term basis as the program grew rapidly, at a period in the life of the program where there was not always the opportunity for adequate reflection in the decision-making process. But now, with the rapid transition

period of growth behind the program*, staff are looking for more strategic decisions to be made, ideally involving a cross-section of staff in the process.* The management team currently engages in periodic strategic planning sessions, and various ad hoc committees and task forces have been created to address strategic issues of importance to the program.

Many staff expressed the hope and expectation that such strategic longer-range planning and consideration of issues would become more prevalent as the program goes forward, building on and broadening some of the processes already in place. *Several expressed the hope that this report could become the basis for framing at least some of the issues to be addressed in such a strategic framework.*

PART FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section summarizes the overall conclusions based on the first four parts of the report, and presents a series of recommendations for the future in Chapter 25. The major recommendations that follow grow out of these primary overall conclusions from the study:

❖ The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection has proven convincingly that it achieves its primary goal of improving school retention and graduation rates, compared to similar students not exposed to the support services provided by HW-SC.

❖ The most important component of the program model appears to be the Youth Advocates' personal relationships developed with the students—and typically sustained and nurtured on a long-term basis over several years, in many cases. These consistent sustained relationships provide strong role models and adult supports that are often in short supply in the lives of many of the young people in the program, and they appear to help motivate students to stay in school at twice the rates of their counterparts who have no such support advocates.

❖ In recent years the program has admitted increasing proportions of low-income, low-achieving students, thereby making it more difficult to be successful. Despite these trends, the program has continued to outperform similar students not in the program by a 2-to-1 margin in graduation rates. However, those graduation rates have declined in the past two years, and are likely to continue at lower levels unless the program changes its admission criteria and/or strengthens its academic support and job placement components.

❖ Despite the program's success in graduating students at much higher rates than would occur without its intervention, it has not had a similar impact in improving academic achievement or attendance levels, or in reducing suspension levels among its students. Again, to address those issues, and to increase the incentive value of jobs to help motivate strong academic performance, the program will need to strengthen the academic

supports available to its students, and increase the numbers of students placed in jobs with mentors.

❖ The program has its most positive retention and graduation impact on the following subgroups of students: African-Americans, females, and students whose family income levels are not at the poverty level. Although graduation rates are lowest among students who enter the program with grade point averages below 2.0, the program retains and graduates three times as many of those students as it does of similar low-achievement students without program supports. The program has its lowest levels of impact with Hispanic students. It has a modest positive impact with male students, though at a considerably lower level than for females, and with poverty students, though at a considerably lower level than for non-poverty students.

With these primary overall findings and conclusions in mind, the concluding Chapter 25 presents CGR's recommendations concerning the future of the program.

25. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the evaluation's findings and overall conclusions, CGR offers a series of recommendations and suggestions for the consideration of Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, its funders, and policymakers at the local, state and national levels. Many of the recommendations have previously been suggested throughout the report, in the context of discussing various findings. Detailed recommendations follow several overarching recommendations about the future of the program, and its implications for potential replication. First, the "big picture" recommendations:

Overall "Big Picture" Recommendations

❖ **Continue strong financial support for the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection:** The program has demonstrated that it makes a significant difference in the lives of the students it serves, and it is having that positive impact NOW. There are areas that need to be strengthened within the program, as discussed throughout the report and in the more detailed recommendations below, but those are recommendations designed to build on the demonstrated strengths of the program. It has demonstrated that it doubles the graduation rate among at-risk urban students. Thus, *continuing support for the program represents a return on investment that will continue to pay dividends in future years as these students go on to college and enter the workforce.*

❖ **Resources need to be devoted to developing a strong academic support system for HW-SC:** The program should not become a separate academic center which attempts to do what the City School District is responsible for doing. But it needs to have access to a number of professional teachers and experienced, committed tutors who can commit to providing dedicated tutoring and in some cases remedial educational support for students in the program. Without this dedicated support, the program will not be able to go beyond the base graduation rate it is currently experiencing, and will not be able to help students advance academically beyond their current levels. In fact, as the program admits more low-income, low-achieving students, the overall graduation rate may decline in the future unless strengthened academic supports are put in place. *To take the program to the next*

level of higher graduation rates and higher levels of academic achievement for greater numbers of students, the program must be able to expand the academic resources it can make available on a consistent, sustained basis to its students, especially if the program continues to admit high proportions of low-achieving students.

Ideally, resources would be made available for such a dedicated academic support resource for the program through the City School District, or through funding over and above the program's existing funding sources. If that is not possible, CGR recommends that a portion of existing sources of funds be diverted or reallocated to provide such academic supports, even if it means serving fewer students in the program as part of the tradeoff. We simply believe that the ability to strengthen the academic supports available to the program is such a necessity that it needs to be done to strengthen the infrastructure of the program, in order to ensure its future ability to serve the increasingly high-risk students it has been admitting in recent years—even if that means making other reductions in program capacity, at least in the short run.

❖ **The HW-SC should enter into a collaborative partnership with the Rochester Business Alliance and/or the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment Board to recruit new Employer Partners to provide jobs, tutors and mentors for future HW-SC students:** As the program has expanded, so too will the demands for jobs for students in the program expand rapidly, as more students move beyond their entering middle school years into the ages where they are most desirable to employers. Substantial increases in jobs for HW-SC students are needed to provide incentives for students to achieve academically, and more jobs will in turn be needed to meet the increased demand that is likely as more students become eligible academically, assuming expanded academic support resources are put in place. *The two efforts must parallel each other: the work (jobs) - scholarship (academics) CONNECTION. These efforts to strengthen both components must be occurring simultaneously.* And to create sufficient jobs to make this strengthened linkage a reality, the larger employer community must become allies of the program and help HW-SC to create jobs en masse, rather than one or two at a time, as the program now is in the position of having to do without a partnership effort as proposed here. *Such an effort will not only benefit the program and hundreds of students, but it will also benefit the employers,*

who will be able to hire job-ready, motivated students, who are less likely to fail at the job than their counterparts not exposed to the program.

❖ **Consideration should be given at the state and/or national levels to establishing a pilot project in another community based on the HW-SC model:** Such a pilot should include the core components of the HW-SC model: Advocates, job-readiness training, and provision of jobs with mentors for those who succeed academically. And it should be evaluated from the beginning of its startup, with decisions about its future—and the possibility of further replications in other communities—based on the findings of the evaluation. CGR believes that the findings from this HW-SC evaluation justify the investment of new resources into a similar program elsewhere, and we hypothesize that, if a local employer is willing to take the job placement lead as Wegmans has done in this community, the pilot project would also be successful in enhancing graduation rates. *The key to such an investment is that this would need to represent <u>new</u> funds. None of the funds currently used to support HW-SC should be diverted to a new initiative, as HW-SC has demonstrated that it should continue to receive full support for continuation of the program. It is successfully serving too many students for funders to back away from their investment in more than 1,000 students a year—an investment that is clearly working and paying current dividends to the investors, and to the larger community.*

❖ **Because of the documented support for the core Youth Advocacy model and the program's impact based on the strength of the long-term relationships the Advocates maintain with their students, consideration should be given to expanding the concept of advocates/mentors to other at-risk students in the Rochester and Syracuse City School Districts:** The concept of linking at-risk youth with adult role models who will work closely with students on an ongoing, multi-year basis, has received strong support from this evaluation—and it appears to work, even without as strong a jobs link for many of the students as will hopefully be in place in the future. That is to say, the ongoing relationship itself appears to have an instrumental effect in improving graduation rates well beyond what they would be for similar young people who do not receive such attention.

Beyond these "big picture" recommendations, other more detailed recommendations follow:

Admission Decisions and Criteria

❖ Although program admissions criteria are clearly stated, only about 60% of all admissions in recent years have fallen within stated GPA eligibility guidelines. The program should clarify its guidelines and ensure that consistent policies are stated and are in fact those upon which people act. There needs to be a clearer consensus among program staff concerning who should be admitted and under what circumstances, and when exceptions are permitted.

❖ With HW-SC's rapid expansion over the course of the last several years, the program has admitted increasingly higher proportions of low-income students. Moreover, the program has also admitted higher proportions of students with low pre-program GPAs. As the program continues to move forward, it will be important to clarify specifically the groups of students the program wishes to serve.

❖ The program achieves its highest graduation rates with students who enter the program with a GPA of 2.5 or more. Indeed, those students who enter the program with GPAs of less than 2.5, and particularly those who enter with GPAs below 2.0, will most likely need enhanced academic supports if they are to successfully graduate at high levels in the future. Although in absolute terms the program has been less successful in helping low-GPA entrants graduate, the graduation rate with program supports for such students has been more than three times higher than for similar students without such supports. Thus, the program must make a conscious decision concerning the mix of students it should focus on, the support services it can provide, and the resulting graduation rates it is realistic to expect and ask for in the future.

❖ Despite the fact that poor attendance is one of the risk factors considered in determining program eligibility, the overall attendance rate in the year prior to program entry averaged 93% across all entering cohorts. Such a number suggests the possibility that attendance is not necessarily a major factor in current admissions decisions and that perhaps more students with attendance problems should be considered viable candidates for admission in the future.

Middle- to High-School Transition Supports

❖ Because average grades clearly decline among HW-SC students after they enter the program, and because this decline is most pronounced among students making the transition from middle school to high school, the program must strengthen its efforts to improve the levels at which students perform academically, and facilitate students' transitions from middle to high school.

❖ Because most high school students who remain with the program, particularly those in their senior years, do eventually begin to achieve at higher academic levels, the program should consider enlisting their support to help build bridges between new and returning students. These older students could serve as "Work-Scholarship Student Mentors," gain satisfaction—and status—from leading by example, and even earn community service recognition for their service to the program and the newer program entrants and/or those making the transition from middle school to high school.

Links Between Jobs and Academic Achievement

❖ According to program data, at best about half and as few as one third of program students at any given time meet the program's eligibility criteria for obtaining a job, and of those, many are not actually placed in jobs by the program. These numbers are low in large part because students' academic performance is low and limits their ability to be considered employable by program standards. In the wake of both insufficient numbers of employable students and an inadequate number of jobs, the program risks losing one of its important and unique incentives. For the program to fulfill the "work and scholarship" components of its name, it must attend more diligently to students' academic deficiencies, and do a better job of finding more job placement opportunities beyond jobs at Wegmans. Both job and academic performance issues must be addressed simultaneously.

❖ As Youth Advocates and the Employment Development Specialist work to provide students with supports in the workforce, the program must continue to underscore the importance of linking jobs to the GPA eligibility requirement. It is essential to hold out the incentive so students know they must work hard in school to be able to obtain and retain jobs through the program.

❖ The Work-Scholarship Connection was founded with the built-in incentive components of jobs and scholarships. These incentives were at the heart of a youth development model that offered

students a reason to succeed in school. As such, the program should carefully monitor and, if necessary, limit further expansion until incentive opportunities can keep pace with demand and students can be adequately prepared to face the challenges posed by such opportunities.

❖ See also the variety of staff suggestions for strengthening academic supports on pages 78 through 80.

Training and Employment

❖ Standardization and documentation of program offerings, such as Job Readiness Training (JRT), will result in more consistently-trained students. The program is in the process of developing a training manual for JRT sessions, and CGR recommends incorporating existing successful job-readiness models into the program's consistent approach, and expanding this sort of standardization to other elements of the program.

❖ HW-SC should begin conversations with community organizations such as the Rochester Business Alliance, the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment Board, and Rochester Works (with its linkages to small businesses) as an additional means of marketing HW-SC and the benefits—to employers and to the community—of hiring the trained, employable students from HW-SC. Program representatives could efficiently follow up on leads generated by initial appeals.

❖ Such a targeted, large-scale marketing initiative appears to be essential if the program realistically expects to create enough new job opportunities in a short enough period of time to respond to the increased need for jobs among program participants. This effort must further convince employers that it is in their interest to hire program students. Moreover, such a system that underscores benefits to the community, the employer and to the students is fundamentally consistent with program goals.

❖ Where new job placement opportunities are created by the program, emphasis should be placed on making sure that mentors are a key component of the commitment made by the new employers.

❖ YAs and the Employment Development Specialist should work together to develop approaches to employers of students who do not have assigned mentors to advocate with the appropriate

persons within those employers to try to link students with mentors as early as possible in the employment process.

❖ When students are employed, the mentoring program is not always implemented consistently. If mentors are a stated part of work with an employer partner, the program must be certain that students get the support they are told they can expect. Closer communications between YAs and mentors would help to improve student performance both at school and at work.

❖ To facilitate this communication, YAs should become more exposed to, and obtain more training related to, the business world so that they may better understand the culture and provide more effective support to students concerning career opportunities.

❖ In order to track students more effectively and determine the characteristics that distinguish between the most successful and less successful job placements in the future, the program needs to have, and is beginning to move toward, the ability to more accurately determine, monitor and analyze the integrated effects of reasons for terminations from jobs, the lengths of stay in employment situations, existence or absence of mentors, presence or absence of job-readiness training prior to obtaining the job, meeting initial and ongoing maintenance of academic standards (at least a 2.0 GPA), job type, student career interest, and whether the job was generated by the program or obtained by the individual student. Such information will be a useful management tool in terms of anticipating problems and providing appropriate training and supports to reduce the number of job terminations in the future.

Graduation and Follow-up

❖ The program goal of at least 75% of all program graduates moving on to some form of post-secondary education, and for at least half of those students to enroll in a four-year college or university, will become increasingly difficult to meet as more students are admitted into the program with lower GPAs. Thus, it becomes all the more important to adhere to the four year "game plan" developed by the Graduate Coordinator, which emphasizes the importance of focusing on academics and good grades at the start of, and throughout, a student's high school career.

❖ To ensure that students transition successfully from high school to college, the program should consider offering pre-college orientation, particularly since many program participants lack role

models or parents with college backgrounds to help provide perspective based on previous college experience.

❖ Orientations should cover such topics as encountering different cultural environments, life in college dorms, course selection and enrollment, using college health facilities, what to take to college and what to leave at home, life with a roommate, "hidden college costs," and the like.

❖ Given the increasing demands on the Graduate Coordinator, it may well be necessary within the next year or so to introduce a second position, perhaps on a part-time basis, to supplement the efforts of the Coordinator. Perhaps this position would focus on the post-graduation/alumni components of the program, including tracking post-graduate successes and helping students adjust to their post-secondary educational or employment situations, and applying what is learned from these transition experiences to modifications within HW-SC as needed.

Strengthening Program Services

❖ An examination of suspension data reveals that about half of all middle school students in the HW-SC were suspended, including two-thirds of those in the 8th grade cohorts. This suggests a need for a particular program focus aimed at reducing suspensions and related behavioral issues among middle school students.

❖ Far fewer than 70% of those who remain in school after their first year in the HW-SC program continue to attend school as much as 90% of the time. Thus the program must place more extensive and intensive emphasis on motivating students to attend class on a regular basis.

Focus Needed on Particular Subgroups

❖ While the program has had some success helping to keep boys in school, it has had little demonstrable impact on improving their levels of academic achievement. The program needs to work to improve academic achievement for all students, but needs to target its efforts especially to males in the program.

❖ The program has had a significant impact on increasing the graduation rate of black students by more than 30 percentage points compared to their non-program counterparts. The program has been significantly less successful, however, in motivating Hispanic and white students to remain in school and to graduate. Future efforts need to address how to increase program impact on these subsets of participants.

❖ Although the program has had some limited impact in improving graduation rates for poverty-level students, fewer than half of those students who have entered the program in the 9th grade or earlier have graduated. Moreover, the program appears to have had little or no impact in helping to improve academic achievement levels among this population. By more effectively linking academics and job availability, the program could see improved success rates with this at-risk poverty-level population of students in the future.

Relations with Schools

❖ Given school reorganization efforts and the inevitable changes in staffing across schools from year to year, it would be advisable to use upper level HW-SC management to re-establish the program presence in each school, each year. As such, we recommend that the HW-SC Executive Director, and perhaps even the President/CEO of Hillside, along with the Manager(s) responsible for liaison with each school, plan to visit each school site in which the program operates to reiterate the value of HW-SC and the program's continuing commitment to serving as a resource to the schools and their students.

❖ Such an introductory meeting could be followed by additional conversations including Managers and Youth Advocates, who would then make presentations to teachers and key administrative and student support staff within each school to remind them of the benefits of the program and how to avail themselves of its services.

❖ Given the reality of the academic struggles facing most HW-SC students, YAs should place more of an intentional focus on developing good working relationships with teachers in their schools. To this end, CGR recommends that each school receive and distribute to all teachers and student support staff a list of all students in the school who are part of the HW-SC, along with the name of each student's Youth Advocate, so contacts can be made directly with the YA when appropriate.

Internal Consistency of Program Practices and Standards

❖ The program faces challenges related to effective internal communication strategies. Staff would value, and respond well, to increased openness in internal discussions.

❖ As the program has expanded and added new staff positions, certain challenges have arisen around issues about clear communication of who is responsible for what. Ensuring that

what happens on a daily basis is reflected in stated program policy and consistent procedures and practices will be useful in ensuring that all program stakeholders feel confident about the direction the program is taking.

❖ In addition to standardizing processes such as data collection and management, student tracking, and Job Readiness Training, more consistent and standardized staff orientation and training are needed in the future for both YAs and Managers.

❖ Particularly in light of the program expansion, it will be important for the program to develop more consistent approaches and expectations regarding such issues as: ensuring that YA caseloads are routinely reviewed by Managers concerning progress against goals, and that consistent means are in place of holding staff and students accountable.

❖ The program is endeavoring to bring consistency to the process of terminating students who fail to meet program requirements. As such, the program must engage in system-wide considerations about the philosophy underlying the assumptions about terminations, and about how, and under what circumstances, decisions to terminate should be made. Such conversations must consider the implications of any changes in the approach to terminations vis a vis the historic mission and philosophy of the program, along with the organization's ability to meet program targets and goals.

❖ Conversations surrounding the topic of termination must consider three related questions:

1. If more students need to be terminated because of poor academic performance and attendance, is this because too many students who fall below the program's eligibility requirements were brought into the program initially?

2. If this is the case, should the flexibility of these criteria be reconsidered?

3. Could the program avoid the need for many terminations by providing more effective academic and job placement supports to a higher proportion of program participants?

❖ See also the suggestions from staff on pages 122-125 concerning training for YAs and Managers. In addition, see the discussion, including suggestions and recommendations, concerning accountability in Chapter 24.

Data and Paperwork/ Documentation Issues

❖ As the program continues to track the progress of the students it serves, it should modify its graduation goal in the future to reflect more accurately the impact of the program, *based on the proportion of all original entering students who actually graduate, rather than on the proportion of <u>retained</u> students.*

Management of Database

❖ The program should clarify goals for data collection and analysis, and eliminate all unnecessary variables from the current database. The program's Access database is commendably comprehensive. But as can sometimes be the case with large relational databases, some information is entered inconsistently and rarely if ever used. The program should only continue to collect data that are maintained consistently and used for management, monitoring or evaluation purposes. Other data should cease to be collected.

❖ Standardize recording in the database. The Work-Scholarship Connection's database includes numerous blanks, some of which represent 0's and some of which are attributable to lack of information, which should be designated with a "-1", for example. For purposes of data analysis, consistent recording according to one rubric is essential.

❖ Designate staff for specific data management tasks. Some data entry work is done by Advocates, other tasks are completed by staff secretaries, still other work is performed by a data entry clerk. As more people work in the database, data are less likely to be reliably and consistently entered and managed. Responsibility for entrance of specific data elements should be clearly established and implemented consistently.

❖ Properly train staff in the use of database software. When those who use a database are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with it as a tool, they make mistakes and can compromise the reliability of information being managed.

❖ By clarifying goals for data collection, by using all data collected and by collecting data consistently, information management procedures will be better aligned with organizational policies.

Improving Use of Information

❖ The program should build on current efforts to solicit staff suggestions concerning the value of, and possible uses for, forms and data currently being collected. Moreover, communicating clearly to staff why information is collected, for whom, and to what end will enable staff to feel more invested in the task of collecting, managing, and processing data and paperwork.

❖ Once reports are generated from HW-SC data, the program should make sure that staff have an opportunity to read what is submitted to funders. This will allow program staff at all levels to feel more a part of, and more accountable to, the entire process of the program.

❖ The program should simplify the reporting process by, whenever possible, requiring that all reports, particularly internal documents like Progress Reports, IDPs and any others that are done routinely, be completed electronically. This will both facilitate ease and consistency of data entry, but also make the process of analyzing and tracking data a simpler one. Ideally, such a requirement should be in place as of a specific date, announced well in advance, so staff can make necessary adjustments in anticipation of the change.

❖ Such a move to a more "paperless office" will mean that discussions with the appropriate officials must begin so that program staff in all schools have Internet access.

❖ As the program continues to assemble data that will enable it to answer key questions about the relationship between student training and employability, academic eligibility, career interests and the like, it should be a priority to ensure that data are collected in such a way that they can be appropriately linked and analyzed according to both students' grade and age.

❖ The program should develop better linkages between YA Progress Reports and Individual Development Plans as means of better tracking student progress.

❖ The program should discuss with funders any potential opportunities, while continuing to meet their legitimate needs for information, to consolidate and simplify the forms, and perhaps reduce the frequency of reporting, currently required by each.

❖ See also the series of staff recommendations regarding paperwork and documentation scattered throughout pages 144 – 148.