

Grand Rapids Community Foundation

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CHALLENGE
SCHOLARS



GRPS
my choice
Grand Rapids Public Schools



CHALLENGE
SCHOLARS ARE
GOING PLACES!
2016-2017 UPDATE REPORT





This is Innovation

Dear Friends,

When we started the Challenge Scholars program in 2011, we said it was a bit like building a bike while riding it. Thanks to our collective years of research and education experience, we had a solid frame, but there were many other moving parts and pieces to get in place. We recognized that we could go on forever planning the perfect bike, but there were kids and families who were waiting for us to get started – and we couldn't make them wait any longer. So, we went for it. There is risk in innovation and to be honest, it was terrifying and thrilling all at once.

Today, with over 500 students enrolled in the program at three schools, and our first class of Challenge Scholars just two years from graduation at Union High School, some of those feelings have changed and others have stayed the same.

It was scary to set out to raise the initial \$32 million needed to launch the program and it was exhilarating to surpass that goal. It was daunting to expand the program to include all students at Union High School and is a bit intimidating to consider a second significant fundraising campaign. Yet we never doubted it was the right thing to do. When we see a family's eyes light up as their student is inducted into the program, we are even more certain. Transformational change is hard work, but it is so incredibly worth it.

To stick with the analogy, today the bike is cruising down the road. The big parts are in place. Other parts are being tweaked, tested, refined, and tested again. This fluidity and openness to evaluation and change is one of the biggest strengths of our partnership. We commend our principals, teachers and school staff for their important role in this work.



We believe that quality urban public education is essential. We believe that all students can succeed. We believe in removing barriers for families to create a more equitable playing field. And we believe that an educated workforce will benefit families and our entire community. Thank you for believing with us.

We are so appreciative of your continued support of Challenge Scholars!



Diana R. Sieger

Diana R. Sieger

President,
Grand Rapids Community Foundation



Teresa Weatherall Neal

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Superintendent,
Grand Rapids Public Schools

Measuring What Matters

It is important for Challenge Scholars donors and stakeholders to understand and see the progress of Challenge Scholars students. Thanks to a data-sharing agreement with Grand Rapids Public Schools, we can show you how our Challenge Scholars students are doing relative to the requirements of the program.



To earn a scholarship that covers four years of college tuition at any public Michigan college or university (and a few private ones too), Challenge Scholars must:

- Sign up in 6th grade and remain enrolled at Harrison Park or Westwood for middle school
- Graduate from Union High School
- Maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher
- Have a 95 percent attendance rate

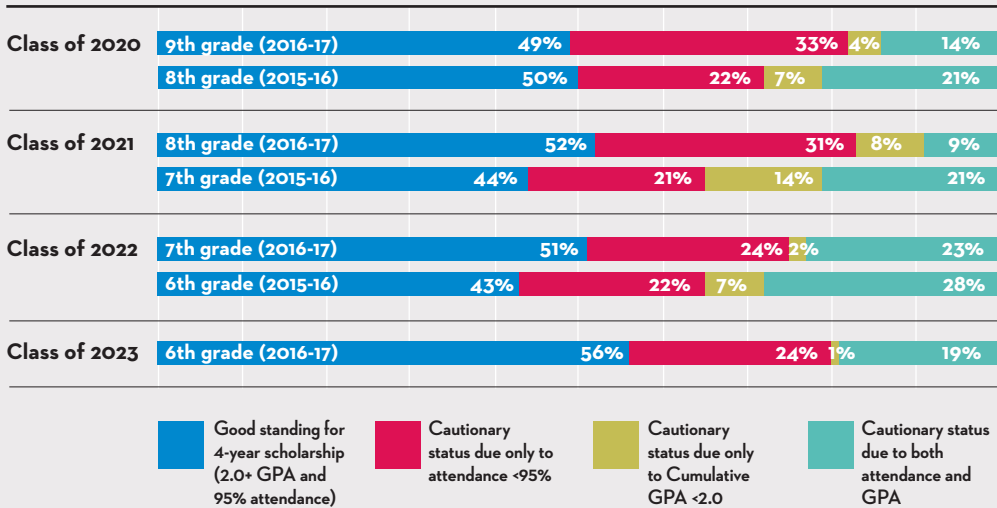


Want to know more about how our Challenge Scholars are doing, or anything about the program? Contact Challenge Scholars program director Cris Kutzli at 616.454.1751 or ckutzli@grfoundation.org.

The chart below illustrates the percentage of Challenge Scholars meeting eligibility criteria over the past two school years. A few things to note as you look at this data:

- The percent of students in good standing (blue) increased over the previous school year for the Class of 2021 and 2022.
- Students in cautionary standing due to attendance (red) could still qualify for two years at GRCC tuition-free.
- Only one year of data for the class of 2023 is shown because these students were in 6th grade last year and are newly enrolled in the program.
- This data helps identify students who should receive extra interventions and support throughout the school year.
- More students struggled with attendance in 2016-2017. This pattern was seen across Grand Rapids Public Schools. District leaders say that rising fears about lack of affordable housing and deportation contributed to the uptick.
- The chart represents only students who signed up for Challenge Scholars in 6th grade. Students who sign up for Challenge Scholars in 9th grade at Union and maintain a 2.0 GPA will earn two years tuition-free at Grand Rapids Community College.

Eligibility Status for Four Year Scholarship



Post-secondary Aspirations

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Percentage of students reporting a desire to pursue post-secondary education (selected either vocational training, 2-year, 4-year, or graduate school).				
Harrison Park (6-8)	59%	62%	69%	66%
Westwood Middle (6-8)	63%	65%	56%	61%
Union High School (9th graders who attended Harrison Park or Westwood)	-	-	-	78%
Union High School (9th graders who attended all other middle schools)	-	-	-	67%

Also Noteworthy: 9th graders at Union who attended Harrison Park or Westwood for middle school were more likely to report an interest in attending a 4-year college compared to those who attended other middle schools.



Meet Tearra and Charbert Fitz

Last school year, Westwood Middle School named Charbert Fitz Student Athlete of the Year. There was an award, an embarrassing slide show, and a gift card. It was a total surprise and a really big deal.

This summer, we had the chance to sit down with Charbert and his mother Tearra to learn more about them and what the Challenge Scholars program means to their family. Charbert is a member of Union High School's Class of 2021.

Staff: As a parent, what do you like most about the Challenge Scholars Program?

Tearra: The program reinforces what I drive at home with my kids (Charbert is one of three in the Fitz family). They are not allowed to play sports unless they have a B or better in every class. In our family, you can't play with Cs. I expect my kids to get good grades, be in school every day and be prepared. I like that Challenge Scholars sets this expectation for everyone in the program. It helps my son feel less like he's the only one doing it.

Staff: What does success look like for Charbert?

Tearra: Success is him being able to say 'I'm going to college and I'm going to the college that I want.' As parents, we have our dreams and aspirations, but when you have kids, it's about making their dreams come true. Success would be seeing him happy and doing what he wants to do.

Staff: Charbert, do you have a college in mind?

Charbert: I want to go to Michigan State University. They have good academic programs and I love their sports teams. One of my favorite running backs, Le'Veon Bell, came from MSU.

Staff: Any ideas for what you'd like to do after college?

Charbert: I want to be a police officer. My mom and my dad did police work when I was little. I've always wanted to do that.

Staff: Where does your motivation come from?

Tearra: We've been a single parent family since the passing of my late husband in 2011. I'm strict. Charbert wants to make me and his late father proud. He also likes having the bragging rights with his siblings. We have a good healthy competition going on here.

Charbert: My sister goes to City and she likes to go on about her grades. I come right back at her about my 4.0—how I had straight A's all four marking periods.

Staff: Tearra, what are you most proud of when you think of Charbert?

Tearra: I'm proud of his hard work and dedication. He had a really rough start to sixth grade. I thought 'oh no, is this going to be my problem kid?' He was struggling to maintain Cs and wasn't going to school prepared. I said if you want to play sports, this is what you have to do. I gave him guidelines and set expectations, and he went for it. He buckled down.

Staff: Charbert, as you start high school, what are you most looking forward to?

Charbert: I'm looking forward to keeping my grades up and playing sports. I play football, basketball, wrestling, and I have to choose between track or baseball. In school, math is my strongest subject.

Very best wishes to Charbert and all our Challenge Scholars for a great school year!

CHALLENGE SCHOLARS SURRO

A long-term, comprehensive, and transformational program like Challenge Scholars would not be possible without the support of our generous donors. Building an endowment to provide in-school supports and scholarships for the long-term requires on-going fundraising. You can give today at challengescholars.org/give.

DONORS AND SUPPORTERS



KICK-OFF CAMP

Challenge Scholars are invited to attend Kick-Off Camp, a three-day summer camp experience. Here, Challenge Scholars learn new skills and practice adapting to a new environment. They make friends, enjoy the outdoors and have FUN!



HIGHER EDUCATION

Many colleges and universities host Challenge Scholars on campus visits. Others bring expertise and experiences into the schools. A handful of institutions even have scholarships already reserved for Challenge Scholars.



WESTSIDE COLLABORATIVE

Community Engagement Coordinators with the WestSide Collaborative connect with Challenge Scholars families outside of school. They help families and non-profit organizations work together to build a hopeful, inclusive and equitable community.



GRAND RAPIDS
community
FOUNDATION

UNDS STUDENTS WITH SUPPORT

PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Families are students' first and best teachers. They provide encouragement, attend family nights, ensure their students are in school every day, and stay up to date on their grades and progress.

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

GRPS prepares students for college and careers. With leadership from the superintendent, and the commitment of principals, teachers and staff at our schools on the West Side, students are gaining the skills for success.

KENT SCHOOL SERVICES NETWORK

A KSSN community school coordinator serves in each Challenge Scholars school to help families access health and human services. Their support keeps students in class every day, so they can continue to learn and achieve.

COLLEGE AND CAREER COORDINATORS

Each Challenge Scholars school is staffed by a college and career coordinator. They inspire students to explore college and career options, and support students in staying on track to earn the scholarship.

GRCF brings all of these partners together around the shared goal of educational attainment. GRCF provides the day to day operational support for Challenge Scholars by making grants, raising money, working with evaluators, and administering scholarships.

Marisol Blanco: Back at Her Alma Mater and Helping Students Succeed



Marisol Blanco graduated from Union High School in 2005. She headed to the University of Michigan where she spent the next five years studying sociology, Spanish, and Latino studies.

Early one morning, on the walk back to her apartment after pulling an all-nighter studying, she came across a flyer for Michigan College Advising Corps. They were hiring U of M grads and placing them in urban schools throughout Michigan to serve as college advisors.

Marisol was intrigued. Enough so that she headed to their informational meeting rather than continuing on to her apartment to crash.

At Union High, Marisol had been a top student academically. She was offered many experiences and opportunities that were not available to her peers. "Because of the caseload, often times kids at the top and kids who are most vulnerable get all the support from school staff. There's a large group of students in the middle who are overlooked," Marisol said.

Reflecting on her experience, Marisol thought she could help. She applied to be one of the college advisors and was offered a position at Ottawa Hills High School. She dedicated the next two years to helping create a college-going culture in the school and helping students get into college.

"I worked with low-income, first-generation students – kids like me. I could talk about my experience and the barriers that I faced," Marisol said.

As part of her role at Ottawa Hills, Marisol helped students navigate the college application process. She always wondered what kind of support the students would receive once they were at college.

When a Success Coach position at Grand Rapids Community College became available, Marisol jumped at the opportunity. In this role, she could focus on student retention and what services students needed once they were in college to keep them there through graduation.

Her experience really came full circle when GRCC success coaches became engaged with Challenge Scholars back at her alma mater, Union High School.

"The openness on the part of Union has been great. Administrators, teachers, and staff get the importance of the Challenge Scholars opportunity for their students. They've welcomed our success

coaches to the environment and have allowed us to become part of the Union family," explained Marisol, who is now associate director of the GRCC's College Success Center.

Today, success coaches are spending time with Challenge Scholars in the classroom. They are building relationships, identifying barriers, and offering support and interventions to students to ensure their success in school.

They are setting goals with students and helping them work towards achieving them. They are also sharing the GRCC campus with students and their families.

"Challenge Scholars is providing a comprehensive approach for students who experience a lot of barriers to higher education. The financial barrier to college is a big one, but there are many others too," Marisol said. "I'm excited to be a part of this and am proud of all the work that the entire team is doing. This is going to have an incredibly positive impact on students, families, and our community."



Interested in learning additional ways you can help support Challenge Scholars? Contact Marilyn Zack, vice president of development at 616.454-1751 x127 or mzack@grfoundation.org. Gifts can also be made using a remittance envelope or by giving online at challengescholars.org/give.



Marilyn Zack