

## Schools First™ Summary



Warren Staley, Cargill CEO, third from left, with principals of participating schools

### What is Schools First™?

A \$1.2 million, four-year project funded by the Cargill Foundation and staffed by the Center for School Change at the Humphrey Institute. Schools First™ helped 11 Minneapolis area public elementary and middle schools, with the aim of:

- a. Increasing student achievement
- b. Increasing family involvement

### Why is Cargill involved in this effort?

Cargill Foundation's priority is to prepare the next generation for success in school, work and life.

### Characteristics of the participating schools:

All 11 schools enroll a high percentage of low income (50-92%) and minority students (52-98%). Nine of the schools were part of the Minneapolis district, one was a charter located in Minneapolis, and one was an Osseo Public School.

### Major features of Schools First™:

1. *Focus:* Require each school to select 1 measurable academic and 1 family involvement goal
2. *Using research:* each school to adopt/adapt ideas that had worked elsewhere
3. *Provide incentives for progress:* From planning (\$5,000) to implementation (\$35,000), from implementation to reward (up to \$11,000)
4. *Team approach:* Each school was required to create a team of educators, and parents
5. *Learning from each other:* Teams were convened twice a year, once at Cargill

6. *Regular, continuing CSC involvement:* CSC staff met often with each team, to help develop goals, create a work plan, monitor progress, help deal with problems, celebrate progress
7. *Cargill Foundation staff were intimately involved with the program* - meeting with CSC staff on a regular basis, helping select participating schools, attending all the conferences, and visiting schools frequently
8. *Cargill gave more than money.* Cargill employees, through a rigorous process selected the schools and in certain instances volunteered on projects. Cargill hosted four meetings at their headquarters.
9. *Progress is rewarded:* Schools often are criticized, and sometimes penalized for LACK of progress. But rewarding progress is rare.



Mr. Staley awards \$11,000 to Cityview Performing Arts Magnet

#### *Major outcomes:*

1. 7 of 11 schools showed considerable progress in reading and math. See examples below.
2. All 11 schools made progress in family involvement.
3. Cargill will provide more than \$100,000 to the schools as a reward for progress (\$11,000 to 7 schools that met both goals, \$6,000 to 4 schools that met one goal.)

#### *Examples of progress:*

1. Bottineau: At this Pre-K – Grade 2 School, 78 % of the 140 students come from low-income families and approximately 1/3 of the children do not speak English as their first language. Bottineau increased by 23% the percent of continuously enrolled students reading at grade level, or making a year's worth of progress (from 71% to 94%).
2. Cityview: This K – Grade 8 School serves 557 students with 86% coming from low-income families. 1/3 of the student population is comprised of English Language Learners (ELL). Cityview increased the percentage of continuously

enrolled students making a year's worth of growth in reading from 13%% to 48%

3. North Star: This K – Grade 5 school serves 741 students, 90% of whom are "students of color," and 90% come from low-income families. North Star increased the percentage of continuously enrolled students making a year's worth of growth in reading from 14% to 48%.
4. Park View: This is a magnet school serving 300 students Pre-K – Grade 6. Park View increased the percent of continuously enrolled students from 33-71%, from 25%-38%, and from 55 to 69% - increases from 13% to 38%, depending on the 3 cohorts.
5. Performing Arts Magnet: This K - Grade 5 North side Minneapolis Public School serves 240 students primarily (87%) from low-income families. About 10% of students are homeless and reside in nearby shelters. PAM increased the percentage of continuously enrolled students making a year's worth of progress from 29% to 66%
6. Sanford: This middle school serves 575 students, grades 6-8. 28% percent of the students are Somali, 33% are African American, 8% Southeast Asian, 10% Native American, and 21% Caucasian. 79% of the students come from low-income families. Sanford increased the percentage of continuously enrolled students passing the Minnesota Basic Skills reading test from 28% to 50%.
7. Zanewood: Eighty-two per cent of the suburban school's 454 students are students of color, and 73% come from low-income families. Zanewood increased by 26% the percentage of continuously enrolled students at grade level from 46% to 72%.



Mr. Staley awards \$11,000 to Park View Montessori

Family involvement increases were also significant. The final evaluation includes full details. A few examples:

1. Cooper increased the percent of families attending fall parent-teacher conferences from 56% to 98%.
2. Jordan Park increased the percentage of families participating in training to help their students learn math from 18% to 74%.
3. North Star increased percent of families attending meetings from 86% to 98%.
4. Park View increased percentage of students coming to conferences by twenty percent, from 77% to 97%.
5. Sanford increased the percent of families attending open house and parent teacher conferences from 20% to 80%.
6. Sojourner Truth increased the percent of families participating in a minimum of two workshops, training, or school visits from 37% to 99%.
7. Zanewood increased the percent of families attending family math activities from 50% to 92%.

Lessons learned:

1. Focus is very important
2. Considerable mobility of principals (principals at 10 of the 11 principals changed.)
3. Technical assistance from CSC staff was a critical element: 86% of the participating teachers rated CSC as either 'extremely helpful' or 'very helpful.'
4. Given the opportunity, schools spent substantial time and money on professional development, to help improve teachers' skills in reading and math instruction, and to help them learn from others about proven methods to increase family involvement.
5. Educators appreciated the importance of meeting together, as well as meeting with national authorities.
6. A variety of practices developed in this program are continuing.
7. According to the outside evaluator, "The pedagogical ideas and action learned in the Schools First™ Program made a lasting imprint on many schools."



Mr. Staley awards \$11,000 to North Star Community School

## Phone Numbers that May be Useful

Toni Green, Senior Program Officer, Cargill Foundation: 952-742-6290

Nell Collier, Principal, Cityview/Performing Arts Magnet: 612-668-2270

Barb Roach, Teacher, North Star: 612-668-2110

John Googins, former Principal, Bottineau: 612-668-0224

Meredith Davis, Principal, Sanford: 612-668-4900

Emily Acosta Thompson, Principal, Zanewood (Osseo district): 763-561-9077

Joe Nathan, Director, Schools First™ - Humphrey Institute: 612-625-3506

