



Genesee County DHS Family Resource Centers – “Scholars” Pilot (updated June 6, 2008)

Family Resource Centers / Genesee Co. DHS “Scholars”

As part of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2003 the Governor’s Office selected Genesee County as one of the counties to implement the Family Resource Center (FRC) initiative, whereby the local DHS places family independence specialist workers on site in targeted schools due to AYP performance levels. These are schools with low MEAP scores.

Statistical data gathered by the Governor’s Office, the Department of Education and DHS’ central office on schools with low MEAP scores disclosed several common characteristics among the schools:

- Families with high mobility rates, with families moving three or more times during the school year.
- Families with high poverty rate backgrounds.
- Families receiving public assistance and other support services from the Department of Human Services (DHS).
- High school absentee rate for the children of such families.
- Poor school grade performance for the children of such families.
- General educational lags among the children of such families.
- For some children in the families, an increase in behavioral and social problems.

Due to these findings, the goals for Michigan Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are to:

- Decrease families’ mobility rate; help families achieve stability relative to their residence.
- Improve the children’s attendance in school, thereby decreasing overall child absenteeism rates.
- Improve regular school grade performance of the families’ children.
- Improve MEAP scores of the families’ children.
- Ensure that there are no educational lags among families’ children.
- Decrease behavioral and social problems of the children through intervention by the school social worker, the DHS worker and other community counseling and support services as necessary.
- Assess the family (parent[s]) to determine if there are other social support needs, connecting the parent(s) to such services.

Genesee County FRCs

The three schools selected as Family Resource Centers under the Governor’s initiative in Genesee County were: Bryant, Washington and Durant Tuuri Mott.

Data specific on Bryant and Washington Schools disclosed commonalities as outlined above: the schools serve families with high poverty rate backgrounds; the majority of families with children in these schools receive public assistance and supportive services from the Department of Human Services (DHS). There was a high rate of mobility among the families with children in these schools. During the 2002-2003 school year, Washington school had a 75.3% mobility rate for families with children enrolled in the school. Bryant had a 58.9% mobility rate for families with children enrolled in the school. These statistics clearly indicate that a significant number of children who started school at Washington and Bryant did not finish the school year in those schools. Instead, they moved on to one or two additional schools based on mobility patterns of the families.

Other available research data on the issue disclosed that each time a child moves during a school year they lose up to 2 months in educational gains, falling behind other students who are not as mobile; that families in poverty in urban areas move frequently for a variety of reasons and that the impact on their children is clear: children's grades suffer, there is a high rate of absenteeism, they lag behind in educational gains, and there is often an increase in behavioral and social problems.

Genesee County FRC Scholars Pilot

The data above reinforced the findings that underlie the Family Resource Center initiative. To enhance success relative to the goals of the FRC initiative, DHS in partnership with the FRC school principals at Bryant and Washington schools, developed the Genesee Scholars Pilot Project. The project focused on the underlying relocation issue, adding an incentive component to help families achieve stability (i.e., avert relocation) through the provision of \$100 monthly toward a family's rent obligation (paid directly to their landlord). Funding for the incentive was secured through a MSHDA grant.

It was anticipated that maintaining families' residential stability would result in stability for the children with improvement in children's school attendance, improvement in regular school grades, school test scores, social skills and, ultimately, in each child's MEAP scores.

A second component was included in the pilot: stability of the target children at school over the two-year period of the pilot. Stability of the children in this context means that the children (students) remained with the same teacher and the same classmates over the course of the pilot period, ending when the children completed the third grade and as they took their first MEAP test. Attendance/absenteeism and test scores were to be tracked and documented for the children in the pilot. Control groups, comprised of children in the remaining second grade classes not part of the pilot, also were initially identified.

The pilot targeted children at Bryant and Washington schools who entered the 2nd grade in September 2004 and followed their progress over a two year period ending when the children completed the third grade (June of 2006) and as they took their first MEAP test.

On July 15, 2004 a meeting and press conference was held with the area landlords, the Landlord Association, MTA, MSHDA, and area politicians to announce the Scholars Program and give an overview of what the program would entail.

In August 2004 DHS received the names of students enrolled for second grade at the target school in September 2004. Families were screened to determine pilot eligibility and letters sent asking for voluntary participation in the pilot. Parents signed pledge forms if they agreed. Participant families were selected on a first-come, first-served basis. Caseworkers and student interns made home calls to each of the scholar parents to assure that the families' housing was acceptable (i.e., sound structure, free from lead paint, no leaks, etc.). The landlords were asked to sign a commitment to allow the scholar parent to remain in the home for the two-year period without an increase in rent.

A kickoff to the pilot was held Aug. 9, 2004, for the FRC workers, the scholars, parents, teachers and principals that included speakers, games and activities for the children as well as lunch and prizes for the kids.

DHS and MSHDA met several times along with U of M Flint. U of M agreed to assist us in data tracking for the Scholars program and one of their interns was assigned to tracking the data as part of her thesis. MSHDA agreed to contract with Genesee County Community Action and Resource Development (GCCARD) to assist in assessing the homes selected for the scholars pilot. MSHDA agreed to provide \$48,000 over a two-year period to assist DHS with the \$100 rent stipend. Twenty-four families with children enrolled at Washington school and were provided the rent incentive and 22 families with children at Bryant school were provided the rent incentive.

Results from the First Pilot Cycle (09/04 through 06/06).

- Pilot Completion: 20 of the 24 families with rent incentives at Washington school completed the pilot period (83% success rate) with their children continuously in the pilot. 20 of 22 families with rent incentives at Bryant school completed the pilot period (90% success rate) with their children continuously in the pilot.
- School attendance rates: The children in the pilot ("scholars") at Washington school attended school 93.8% of the time that school was in session over the time period of the first pilot cycle. The scholars at Bryant school attended on a 90.6% basis over the same time period. The non-pilot children at Washington school attended school 91.6% of the time that school was in session over the time period of the first pilot cycle. The non-pilot children at Bryant school attended on an 88.7% basis over the same time period. The only "significant" attendance data in the first cycle concerns children at Bryant school. At Bryant, 96.3% of the pilot children attended school over the extent of the first cycle. However, the non-pilot children attended on an 88.7% basis over the same time period. We have no specific data on the reasons behind these figures and can only speculate as to the reasons.
- The scholars in both schools tested below the schools' average scores at the beginning of the school year that began September 2004. By the end of the first pilot cycle, however, 75% of the children tested at a 2nd grade or above level, while 35.3% of children in the control group tested at a 2nd grade or above level. The control group was comprised of the 2nd grade students at each school, who were not part of the pilot, approximately 40 additional students at each school.

The Scholars Program pilot turned out to be a success. The data indicates that the Genesee Scholars made significant improvements in several areas. Both school principals and teachers reported their delight in the program's achievements.

Genesee Co. DHS "Scholars" Program – 2006-2008

The Scholars Program was changed for the second two-year cycle (September 2006 to June 2008). Twenty students from three different 2nd grade classrooms at Bryant and 23 students from one classroom at Washington comprised the Genesee Scholars Program for the second cycle. We compared the scholars' attendance and test scores to the other non-scholar students at both schools during the two year period. MSHDA, through a grant from the Cities of Promise, made the \$100 stipend to landlords for the scholars' families who are not receiving assistance from DHS in the form of food assistance, medical, and/or child day care, while DHS paid the \$100 stipend to landlords for scholars' parents who were receiving additional DHS services.

Results from the Second Pilot Cycle (09/06 to 06/08)

- **Pilot Completion:** Twenty-three families with rent incentives enrolled their children at Washington school in September 2006. As of June 2008, 17 of 23 families continued with the rent incentives and the children enrolled at Washington school (74.0% success rate). Twenty families with rent incentives enrolled their children at Bryant school in September 2006. As of June 2008, 14 of 20 families continued with the rent incentives and with their children at Bryant (70% success rate). We do not currently have data on why 6 families decided to drop the rent incentive.
- **Attendance:** The attendance data has been culled for the time period from September 2006 to April 1, 2008. All of the attendance data were not yet available as of the time that attendance data were gathered. The scholars at Washington school attended school on a 95.7% basis over the time period of the second cycle up to April 1, 2008. The scholars at Bryant school attended on a 96.3% basis over the same time period.

The non-pilot children at Washington attended school on a 93.0% basis over the same time period as the children in the pilot, while the non-pilot children at Bryant attended on a 93.5% basis over the same time period.

There are not significant differences between the attendance rates of pilot/non-pilot children at either Washington or Bryant schools for the second cycle; however, we do not yet have all of the attendance data for the months of April, May and the portion of June that school was still in session. The additional attendance data may change the results.

- **MEAP Results**

Washington School

There were 17 pilot children ("scholars") who took the MEAP. Student MEAP results fall into: 1 = Advanced; 2 = Proficient; 3 = Partially Proficient; 4 = Not Proficient

Of the 17 scholars, all passed the math portion of the MEAP. 16 passed the reading portion and 1 failed (4 = Not Proficient). 17 passed the writing portion. 16 of 17 passed the English/language/arts portion but 1 failed (4 = Not Proficient).

Of the 17 scholars who took the MEAP, 2 failed 1 MEAP portion each. Overall there was an approximate 88% “pass” rate for the 17 scholars.

At Washington school there were 18 non-pilot children who took the MEAP. All 18 passed the math portion. 17 of 18 passed the reading portion but 1 failed (4 = Not Proficient). All 18 passed the writing portion and all 18 passed the English/language/arts portion. Overall there was an approximate 95% pass rate for the 18 non-scholars.

Bryant School

There were 14 pilot children (“scholars”) who took the MEAP at Bryant.

All 14 passed the math portion. 12 of 14 passed the Reading portion but 2 failed (4 = Not Proficient). All 14 passed the writing portion. 12 passed the English/language/arts portion but 2 failed (4 = Not Proficient).

Overall, 12 students/scholars did well but 2 failed at least one portion of the MEAP. There was an approximate 86% pass rate for the 14 scholars.

At Bryant, 49 non-pilot students took the MEAP. All 49 non-pilot children passed the math portion. 41 passed the reading portion but 8 failed. 49 children passed the writing portion and 49 passed the English/language/arts portions. Overall, of 49 non-pilot children, there were 8 who failed a portion of the MEAP resulting in an approximate 84% pass rate.

Note: The comparison at Bryant between scholars and non-scholars may not be appropriate in this instance inasmuch as the control group was significantly larger (49 children) than the scholars group (14 children). Had the control group been somewhat more along the group size of the scholars, a more accurate comparison could have been completed. There may still be a way to evaluate the pilot group versus non-pilot group and we will explore this with Bryant to determine if the plan is workable.

Cities of Promise

The Cities of Promise is an initiative of Governor Granholm that aims to re-develop communities and reduce poverty in cities experiencing devastating conditions due to declining population, extreme poverty, high unemployment, loss of industry and jobs, crumbling infrastructure and blighted neighborhoods. The goals of the initiative include: improving neighborhood safety for children, substantially increasing the number of blighted residential structures demolished in each of the cities through strategic demolition activities, increasing income skills of homeless persons in the cities, increasing the use of deconstruction (salvaging/recycling usable materials) in place of and/or in conjunction with demolition to remove unwanted structures and rebuild communities and increase the use of holistic market-based neighborhood revitalization plans tied to blight.