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New Georgetown Study Says Families Extremely Pleased With D.C. Scholarship Program

- *Parents very satisfied with children's self esteem, work ethic, attitudes toward learning*
- *Parents' involvement has dramatically increased since children entered program*
- *Parents skills in evaluating educational choices grow significantly*

WASHINGTON, D.C. - A study released today by Georgetown University indicates that the parents of students in the federally funded D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program are becoming more active consumers of education, more involved in their children's education, and are communicating better with their children. The study also shows that most parents with students in the program are very satisfied with their experience due to the transformation of their children's attitudes about learning.

"This study shows that the District's families will rise to the task to ensure the best education possible for their children," said Joseph E. Robert, Jr., chairman of the Board of Directors of the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF), the organization administering the program. "This program has been a resounding success in every way. These students are thriving academically and their parents have become more involved in their children's lives, both in and out of school."

This qualitative academic study of D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program families' experiences was done through personal interviews and focus groups of a randomized sample of the families of 180 students.

According to the study:

- Parents of scholarship students were "emphatic" about the dramatic increase in their involvement with their children's life experiences after they entered the program.
 - The program's parents are developing critical consumer skills - such as evaluating the options for their children's education - and are maximizing their benefits. Parents are remaining active after they make their initial decisions, continually evaluating their choice and recognizing that they have options.
 - Parents were enthusiastic about the improved communication with their children since they entered the program, and said their children's communication skills are greatly improved.
 - Parents of scholarship students reported great satisfaction with the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and their children's schools based on their children's improved attitudes toward learning, their
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work ethic, and their high levels of self esteem.

"WSF staff work one-on-one with families from the minute they apply," said WSF's Interim CEO Greg Cork. "Our goal is to expand their resources as much as possible, and help them navigate what is often a new educational landscape."

The study, which was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, reports that many families were able to choose a school for their children by evaluating class size and teacher qualifications. The majority of parents were extremely satisfied with their experience in the program.

Many parents expressed concerns that they could lose their child's scholarship due to small changes in income or family structure. However, legislation passed by Congress in December (after the study's interviews and focus groups were completed) allows only families that are in the federally mandated evaluation to earn up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. As a result, more than 300 students who stood to lose their scholarships in the next three years will be able to keep them. Losing these students threatened the evaluation because they would have been studied as if they could have used the scholarship, thereby compromising the study. The average household income of a D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program student is 112 percent of the federal poverty level - far below the income cap for entering students, which is 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

In its third academic year, more than 1,800 low-income D.C. students enrolled in 58 participating District of Columbia schools. The average annual household income of these students is approximately \$21,000 - 106% of the poverty level. Scholarship students receive up to \$7,500 per year to pay for tuition, transportation and school fees at participating D.C. schools. The federal legislation that created the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program also provides additional funds for D.C. Public Schools and D.C. public charter schools.

The Washington Scholarship Fund, founded in February 1993, is committed to providing low-income Washington, D.C. families a choice in where they send their children to elementary, middle, and high school and to helping fulfill the promise of equal educational opportunity for all. During the past 13 years, WSF has provided nearly \$31 million in scholarships to more than five thousand students through the federally funded Opportunity Scholarship Program and the privately funded Signature Scholarship Program.

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