



Washington
Scholarship
Fund

WSF NEWS

Fall Edition 2004

More Than 1,000 D.C. Opportunity Scholars Enroll in Private Elementary, Middle and High Schools

Privately Funded Signature Scholarship Program Welcomes 82 New Students

Under the nation's first federally funded K-12 scholarship program, 1,016 D.C. children have enrolled in private schools for the 2004-05 school year. The Opportunity Scholarship Program provides eligible D.C. children with up to \$7,500 for tuition, transportation and fees to attend private schools in the District of Columbia.

The U.S. Department of Education and D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams selected the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF) to administer the Opportunity Scholarship Program in late March, which gave the organization only a few short months to implement the program in its inaugural year. The families, the 53 participating schools and WSF worked hard to overcome the time constraints. All that hard work paid off in September when students enrolled in their new schools.



Seventh grade Opportunity Scholar Sarojinee Rathor tackles an assignment at Rock Creek International School, her new school.

"We're absolutely thrilled that, after such a rapid program launch, more than one thousand District children and their families this year are taking advantage of this pioneering program in school choice," said Sally Sachar, WSF's President and CEO. "We're well on our way to achieving our goal of filling the program during the first two years and giving 1,600 to 1,900 D.C. children and their families access to educational choice."

WSF planted the seeds for strong enrollment numbers last spring. During a three-week period between late April and mid-May, WSF accepted applications from nearly 2,700 children, more than 1,800 of whom were eligible for the program. Overall, WSF and its partners (Fight for Children and D.C. Parents for School Choice) received inquiries from families representing 8,500 children.

"The fact that we've brought the benefits of school choice to so many children in so short a time is testament to the dedication and commitment of District families who are looking for new opportunities for their children, and the scores of schools who signed up to participate in this inaugural year," said Joseph E. Robert, Jr., Chairman of the WSF Board of Directors.

For the families, enrollment in a participating school was the culmination of months of hard work. WSF worked extensively with families to ensure that they found the right schools for their children. The school fair, held at the Thurgood Marshall Center in June, gave families a chance to meet with leaders from the program's participating schools. From there, the families and WSF worked together to navigate the school search process. Despite the long hours, the families know their hard work was worth it.

"I am so thrilled and grateful," said Shirell Simmons, whose daughter, Kennedy, is attending Rock Creek International School. "We should be able to put our kids in the best position that allows them to pursue their dreams."

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"Next Generation" Grant to Boost WSF Volunteer Corps

In August, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) awarded WSF a "Next Generation" grant.

Competition among non-profits throughout the U.S. was fierce for the two-year grant, which is designed to help organizations build programs in community service and volunteerism. More than 1,150 organizations applied for a "Next Generation" grant; only sixteen organizations received money, including WSF.

"We are deeply honored to receive this grant, especially considering the large number of deserving organizations that applied," said Ruth Bollinger, WSF's Chief Financial and Operations Officer. "This money will allow WSF to build a corps of volunteers to help support our scholarship families and students."

CNCS works with organizations like WSF to provide opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities. "(The Next Generation Grant) allows us to support some amazing social entrepreneurs and to test new ideas about providing service in new areas," said David Eisner, CEO of CNCS. "We're going to learn a lot from these programs and, as we do, a lot of communities are going to benefit immeasurably from their work."

WSF will dedicate the grant to enhancing its volunteer network. The goal is to provide families with wraparound volunteer services to guide them through the Opportunity and Signature programs from application to graduation. Central to this goal is the incorporation of current and former WSF families and students.

"Who better to help a new scholarship family than someone

who has actually been through the entire process?" asked WSF's Director of Scholarship Programs and Outreach Alicia Robinson, who heads up the volunteer network. "Our scholarship parents and students will serve as valuable guides for families as they navigate the programs. At the same time, we look forward to tapping into other experts throughout the D.C. area who have so much to offer our scholarship families."



WSF volunteer Diller Matthews helps out through the "Next Generation" program.

Volunteers will work to recruit D.C. families to apply for both the federally funded Opportunity Scholarship Program and the privately funded Signature Scholarship Program. They will also help families through the application process and continue to provide assistance once families are enrolled in a scholarship program through a series of seminars. These seminars will touch on a number of key issues for families, including strategies to help ease the transition to private school, helping with

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PRINCIPALLY Speaking

Central to expanding educational opportunities for D.C. students are the participating schools. We thought you would enjoy reading about the dedicated and inspiring school leaders who make a difference every single day in the lives of WSF scholarship recipients. With the arrival of each new season, WSF News will feature a school leader. To launch this series, we profile Rock Creek International School's Head of School, Danny Hollinger, a major partner with WSF in both of our scholarship programs.

Danny Hollinger has been an educator for nearly two decades. He has spent practically his entire career at RCIS, which opened in 1988 and is currently serving many WSF scholarship recipients. In fact, he is the only Head of School RCIS has ever known. Hollinger says love for his work is the key to his longevity at the school.

"I can't think of anything better than working with my talented, intelligent, hard-working, good-humored, and open-minded colleagues at RCIS," Hollinger said. "I am so excited to come to school each day because each day is filled with the challenges and rewards of making real differences in children's lives."

Rock Creek International, as the name implies, boasts one of the District's most diverse student bodies and a foreign language immersion program. Visit either RCIS's lower school (grades Pre-K to 4) or middle school (grades 5 to 8) and you will see students of many races and nationalities. Hollinger says this diversity is one of his favorite aspects of life at RCIS.

"What could be better than being in the presence of beautiful, curious, smart, happy children from all over the world?" said Hollinger. "They love school and amaze us constantly with their questions, insights, accomplishments and occasional shenanigans."

Hollinger, a native of Ephrata, Pennsylvania, has lived in Washington for 23 years. He and his wife, Dawn, have three children – Aaron, 12; Abigail, 11; and Hannah, 8. As a father of three, Hollinger, 47, says he understands the importance of school choice.

"Education is one of the most important factors

in a child's life, yet the quality of our children's education in the United States is as different as night and day," Hollinger said. "That's indefensible for a country with our resources. To truly offer equal educational opportunity for our children, parents need the resources and ability to choose the school that will educate their children."



Danny Hollinger, Head of School, Rock Creek International School

Several WSF Signature Scholars have been students for years at RCIS. The privately funded Signature Scholarship Program provides up to \$2,000 for eligible children in grades K-8 and up to \$3,000 for eligible children in grades 9-12 to attend private schools in D.C., Maryland and Virginia. In addition, many WSF Opportunity Scholars – who receive up to \$7,500 for tuition, transportation and fees as part of the nation's first federally funded scholarship program – are enrolled at RCIS; the school boasts one of the largest contingents of Opportunity Scholars in the program. It's a group that Hollinger says is adapting to its new surroundings well.

"I'm not sure I could identify which kids are WSF and which are not," said Hollinger. "In fact, I do not want to. They are RCIS students. And we are truly pleased to have them with us."

WSF, along with its board and partners, are truly pleased to have visionary school administrators like Hollinger involved with D.C. school choice.

"School leaders like Danny Hollinger make it possible for deserving D.C. children to benefit from a wonderful education," said C. Boyden Gray, Vice Chairman of WSF's Board of Directors. "Rock Creek International School, with all its diversity, creates a superb learning environment for children that will serve as the foundation for everything they aspire to accomplish in life." ~



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Hope and Opportunity for D.C. Children Make Wonderful Holiday Gifts

December, 2004

Dear Friend,

As you prepare for the holidays, 62 students at Princeton, Syracuse, Maryland and many other colleges and universities are packing up for winter break. These 62 share a distinct bond. They're all from low-income D.C. families. And as grade-schoolers, they received the life-changing gift of school choice from supporters of the Washington Scholarship Fund.

Their families wanted what we all wish to give our children: choices. Through WSF they were able to choose private and out-of-boundary public schools in the D.C. metro area that satisfied their children's thirst for knowledge.

We're certainly thrilled with these successes. But WSF is devoted to the task at hand. The number of students with no educational options increases daily. We need your help more than ever.

The Signature Scholarship Program's nearly 800 elementary, middle and high school students require \$1.5 million from WSF each year. And there are many more children waiting in line for financial assistance who have yet to benefit. Your generosity can help brighten the educational horizons of all of these children.

These children could be America's future innovators and leaders – students who want nothing more than an opportunity to be a part of a dynamic, high-quality learning environment. Unless we reach them now, their passion to succeed can quickly fade, along with their potential.

You have the power to open new doors for these students. Your tax-deductible contribution to WSF will enable low-income D.C. families to choose between private and out-of-boundary public schools by giving them a much needed scholarship to pay tuition costs. And Children's Scholarship Fund will match your donation 33 to 50 cents on the dollar.

Rest assured, WSF students take full advantage of their opportunities. Nearly 95% of WSF graduates go on to college. One mother said the scholarships gave "new hope" for her daughters. A father, beaming with pride, told us his children now had the chance to "make a difference in society." Can you imagine a better gift?

Don't let poverty deprive children of the bright futures they deserve. Help us make an immediate and lasting difference in the lives of D.C. students.

From all of us at WSF, I thank you in advance for your generosity. Happy holidays and best wishes for the New Year.

Sincerely,

Sally J. Sachar, President and CEO

P.S. – Giving is easy! Just call Ruth Bollinger at (202) 293-5560, x16 or visit www.washingtonscholarshipfund.org and click "Donate."

Family Focus

For a single mother, raising a child is a difficult and often costly labor of love. Imagine what it would be like to raise four children — especially if you wanted all four of those children to attend private schools.

Norma Corcuera has four children — Jonathan, 21; Johanna, 18; Janice, 16; and Jason, 15 — who have all been or are currently Signature Scholars. Johanna was the first to receive a Signature Scholarship in 1998. The Signature Scholarship Program provides up to \$2,000 for eligible D.C. children in grades K-8 and up to \$3,000 for eligible D.C. children in grades 9-12 to attend private schools in D.C., Maryland and Virginia.

"I applied and she got it," Corcuera said. "I was like, 'Oh my!' Now we'll be able to do it."

Corcuera quickly enrolled Johanna at Washington International School. Since the Signature Scholarship Program awards scholarships to siblings, Jonathan, Janice and Jason

followed their sister into private schools. It wasn't long before Corcuera noticed a difference in her children's school work.

"The issues they cover are better," said Corcuera. "Some of the books I see them with are like college books."

Despite the difficult school work, Corcuera's children have thrived in their private schools. Johanna graduated from Washington International School in 2004 and is now a freshman at Marymount University. Seeing her children do so well in their new schools prompted Corcuera to make a change in her own life. In 1998, the native of Peru went back to college. She graduated from Marymount in 2000. Corcuera now works as a registered nurse at the George Washington University Hospital and feels better about how her children view her.



Signature Scholarship graduate Johanna Elias and her mother, Norma Corcuera, enjoy the 2003-04 Signature Scholarship graduate ceremony in June.

"After putting them in a private school, I went to school myself," Corcuera said. "I want to be more for them. I want to be a professional. I want them to be proud of me, too."

"The Signature program changed not only my life but my children's lives. Now they have expectations in life. If you have an opportunity like this, go for it. It will make a difference in your kids' lives." ~

Next Generation *continued from page 2*

homework challenges and balancing the demands of work and family.

The grant will also enable WSF to create a speaker's bureau that will feature current scholarship program families and students, scholarship program graduates and students from Capital Partners for Education, a WSF partner organization that works with D.C. high school students.

The grant is already paying dividends for WSF. Under the grant, Diller Matthews works as a volunteer at WSF. Matthews, who is about to graduate from James Madison University, says his stay with WSF has opened his eyes to the benefits of school choice.

"During my time with the Washington Scholarship Fund, I have been able to experience firsthand the impact a scholarship program like this can have," said

Matthews. "This experience has taught me the overwhelmingly positive impact that expanded educational options can have on a family and a child's life."

WSF's volunteer program will be evaluated by Philliber Research Associates. Philliber will assess the volunteers' experiences and determine how successful the program is in helping scholarship program families. ~

Scholarship *continued from page 1*

WSF has kicked off the application process for the 2005-06 school year. On September 1, WSF began taking applications at its 15th Street offices and at the D.C. Parents for School Choice offices. In addition to extending its office hours, WSF held a four-day application meeting at the D.C. Armory (see article on Page 7 for more).



WSF Family Application Coordinator Don Johnson works with a family at WSF's offices. Families can apply at WSF's offices, at the D.C. Parents for School Choice office or at a neighborhood application meeting.

"I am very proud of the launch of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, which clearly draws on WSF's more than decade-long track record running a scholarship program for elementary, middle and high school students in D.C.," said Lawrence C. Nussdorf, Treasurer of WSF's Board of Directors. "We know the first year is just the beginning, but it marks a very robust start in this historic endeavor in expanding school choice for low-income families in our community."

The Opportunity Scholarship Program wasn't the only WSF scholarship program to find success in 2004-05. The privately funded Signature Scholarship Program boasts 82 new students this year, bringing its current total to nearly 800. The Signature program provides up to \$2,000 for eligible children in grades K-8 and up to \$3,000 for eligible children in grades 9-12 to attend private schools in D.C., Maryland and Virginia. This program is funded entirely by generous donations from individuals, foundations,

"We know the first year is just the beginning, but it marks a very robust start in this historic endeavor in expanding school choice for low-income families in our community."

— Lawrence C. Nussdorf
Treasurer of WSF's Board of Directors

corporations and non-profit institutions.

"We're very proud of what we've done," Sachar said. "Thanks to the hard work of everyone involved, nearly 2,000 D.C. students this year are experiencing the benefits of school choice through WSF's Opportunity and Signature programs. We have expanded the educational horizons for these children and that gives each and every one of them a brighter future."

For more information on the Opportunity Scholarship Program, log on to www.dcscholarship.org. For more information on the Signature Scholarship Program, visit washingtonscholarshipfund.org. ~

New Names Set WSF Programs Apart

As summer's change to autumn marked the start of school for D.C. children, WSF announced changes of its own designed to help families and schools distinguish between its two scholarship programs.

The privately funded scholarship program has a new name: the **Signature Scholarship Program**. The federally funded program will now be known as the **Opportunity Scholarship Program**.

WSF searched for monikers that would differentiate and accurately describe the two programs. The new names fit the bill on both fronts.

"The federally funded program is all about opportunity," said Jennifer Brown, WSF's Chief Program Officer. "The scholarship money for this program gives low-income families educational opportunities they would otherwise never have. The privately funded program, which

also affords families educational opportunities, has been around for more than a decade. It is WSF's signature program, so we think the new name is perfect."

Prior to the changes, the privately funded program was simply called the "Washington Scholarship Fund" and the federally funded program was known as the "D.C. K-12 Scholarship Program." ~

D.C. Armory Event Kicks Off 2005-06 “Opportunity” Application Push

WSF officially began the 2005-06 Opportunity Scholarship Program application season in mid-October with a four-day family application meeting at the D.C. Armory. The federally funded Opportunity Scholarship Program provides D.C. children with up to \$7,500 for tuition, transportation and fees to attend D.C. private schools.

The Armory event was actually two occasions in one. After applying for the program, families met with representatives from many of the program's participating schools to learn more about the schools and what they have to offer.



WSF volunteer Delante Hillton, a student with Capital Partners for Education, and WPGC deejay Shack n'd Pack outside the D.C. Armory. WPGC broadcast from the event as part of the station's partnership with WSF.



English and Spanish versions of posters advertising the Opportunity Scholarship Program.



"The kickoff of our application season at the D.C. Armory has increased the buzz about the Opportunity Scholarship Program while also delivering a significant number of applications eleven months before the start of the next school year," said Alicia Robinson, WSF's Director of Scholarship Programs and Outreach. "We're extremely pleased with how things are going."

WSF began accepting Opportunity Scholarship applications for the 2005-06 school year on

September 1. Application meetings are planned for virtually every week throughout the application period. These application meetings, which are held at various locations throughout the District, allow families to apply for the program in their own neighborhoods. WSF's outreach partners, including D.C. Parents for School Choice, The Greater Washington Urban League, Capital Partners for Education, Strategic Coalitions & Initiatives and the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise have been integral to WSF's success in reaching families. The first lottery to distribute scholarships for 2005-06 will take place in early 2005; additional lotteries will be held as needed throughout the spring of 2005.

WSF has undertaken an extensive promotional campaign to get the word out about applying to the program. Since September, WSF has distributed tens of thousands of fliers, mailers and posters to D.C. families, businesses, youth clubs, community centers and faith-based organizations. In addition, the organization has advertised application meetings on Metro platforms, on Metrobuses, in newspapers including *The Catholic Standard*, *The Afro-American* and *El Pregonero* and on 95.5 WPGC, the D.C. metro area's top-rated radio station. ~

Calling All Volunteers

There are many ways you can help hundreds of D.C. students and their families make the most of the opportunities they receive through WSF. If you'd like to explore what you can offer as a WSF volunteer, please e-mail Alicia Robinson at arobinson@washingtonscholarshipfund.org.

Here are a few examples of how you can help our students:

- Getting the word out to families about available scholarships
- Linking WSF to speakers who can address our families' needs, such as helping with homework, transitioning to private school or balancing the demands of work and home
- Volunteering with our annual WSF golf tournament
- Come to our offices and help us work with applicant families, get mailings out or help in several other ways



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