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HILLSIDE WORK-SCHOLARSHIP CONNECTION EVALUATION PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT 2006 UPDATE AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Prepared for:
The Hillside Family of Agencies/Work-Scholarship Connection

Donald E. Pryor, Ph.D.
Project Director

One South Washington Street
Suite 400
Rochester, NY 14614
Phone: (585) 325-6360
Fax: (585) 325-2612

100 State Street
Suite 330
Albany, NY 12207
Phone: (518) 432-9428
Fax: (518) 432-9489

www.cgr.org

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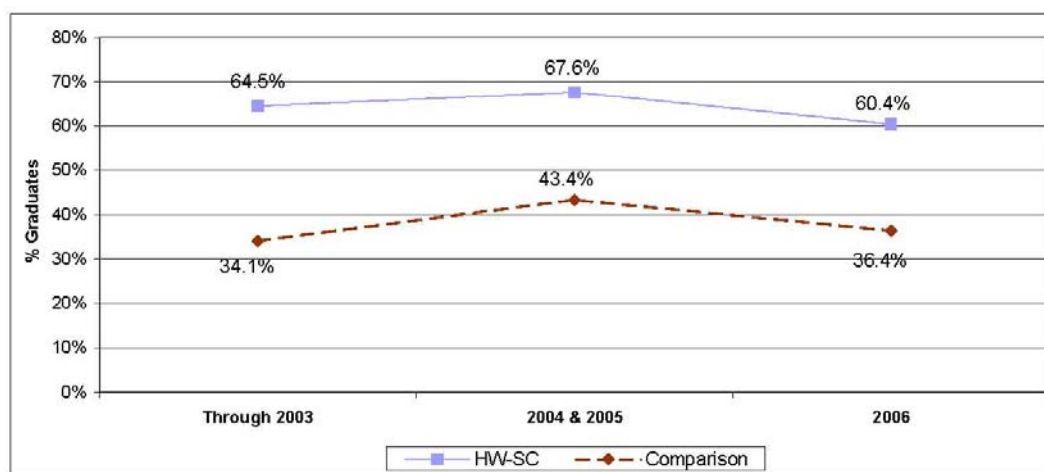
SUMMARY

In an ongoing effort to strengthen the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection (HW-SC) and to improve the outcomes of its students, the Hillside Family of Agencies and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation commissioned a third in a series of program evaluations by CGR. This 2006 evaluation included updated graduation rates of program participants versus rates of comparable students not exposed to HW-SC and an assessment of factors affecting graduation rates and academic performance.

Among the key findings and conclusions from this 2006 evaluation update of HW-SC are:

- ❖ The HW-SC model is conceptually sound and continues to result in graduation rates among program participants which are significantly higher than among at-risk comparison group students not exposed to the program (not including students who enter the program in 7th grade).

Figure 1
HW-SC and Comparison Group Graduation Rates: 2006 and Historical Rates



Note: Results include students entering in the 8th, 9th and 10th grades (and their comparison group students). 7th-grade students not included.

- ❖ The program continues to justify broad financial support, with the focus on maintaining and strengthening the model.
- ❖ At the same time, this evaluation and numerous data analyses have raised several issues and challenges that need immediate attention and assessment in order to continue to support and strengthen the promise of the HW-SC model and to ensure that historical graduation rates for program students can be maintained and hopefully increased in the future. Those issues include:
 - ◆ The graduation rate in the class of 2006, though higher than in the comparison group, was lower than in any previous year. For the first time in the program’s existence, more than half of all students in that 2006 class terminated from the program without graduating. Although some of those “terminees” subsequently graduated from the City School District (and are therefore included in the Figure 1 graduation rates), most did so two to three years after their last connection to HW-SC, thus making the direct relationship between the program services and the graduation several years later somewhat more tenuous.
 - ◆ Certain “leading indicators” do predict lower graduation rates. These include low socioeconomic status, overage for grade,

family receiving public assistance, and existence of four or more risk factors. There are increasing proportions of students among the *existing* HW-SC student body with such factors—and there is the likelihood under the new program admission criteria of increasing proportions in the *future* of program students with documented risk factors associated with lower historical graduation rates. Thus there is a significant potential risk for continued lowering of the program graduation rate in the future, in the absence of offsetting strategies to address these issues, as suggested in the report. This potential for lower future overall graduation rates could be further heightened by the smaller proportions of entering 10th-graders likely under the new admission process in the future (thereby reducing the numbers of students with the historically highest graduation rates among program entrants).

- ◆ Despite clear signs of early warnings of academic difficulties among students who ultimately terminate without graduating, Youth Advocates and Managers have intervened infrequently with teachers in classes where students are not doing well. Despite program efforts to set up a variety of tutoring and other academic supports, they have had only limited impact in strengthening academic performance among program students.
- ◆ Students who meet the criteria for employment and are placed in jobs are more than twice as likely to graduate as are those not employed while in the program. However, only about 55% of the students obtain job placements while in the program, including only about one-third in jobs with employer partners which offer worksite mentors. Graduation rates and academic performance are consistently lower among students who do not meet employment standards and who are not placed in jobs with employer partners.
- ◆ College preparation has only been provided in the past to students in 11th and 12th grades. Small proportions of all students, especially in middle school and early high school years, have obtained consistent college preparation support, and few of the students who graduate have obtained academic scholarships designated by Monroe County four-year partner colleges for qualified HW-SC graduates.

- ◆ There are wide variations in how YAs spend their time, record what they do, interact with students and teachers, track student performance, and are supervised and held accountable. They also differ considerably in how successful their students are in the program.
- ◆ Graduation rates among students entering the program as 7th-graders continue to be well below the rates of program students who enter in later grades (43% versus 66%). Cumulative 7th-grade graduation rates are barely higher than rates among at-risk comparison group students (43% versus 39%). Based on differential graduation rates by entering grade, if the program were to substitute 100 9th-grade program entrants for 100 7th-grade entrants for each of the next four years, the program would produce an additional 120 graduates within the CSD over a four-year period (an 86% increase over the comparable number of graduates likely among 7th-graders).
- ❖ Applying the program's new admission criteria/risk factors to students in the City School District, it is clear that there are far more students who would qualify for the program than HW-SC could serve in a year, even if the program were to double in size.
- ❖ The 2006-07 program year is a pivotal one in the life of HW-SC. Based on previous CGR evaluations, preliminary findings reported to the program from August through November from this 2006 evaluation, and extensive program review initiated with support from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the program has begun to make a number of changes and to plan for various initiatives needed to strengthen the program model. Changes under way or in various stages of planning include:
 - ◆ implementation of a new set of risk factors to determine program eligibility;
 - ◆ steps to strengthen academic supports for program students;
 - ◆ changes in the job readiness, job availability and post-secondary support components of the program;

- ◆ changes in how the program maintains and uses data on students as management tools to more effectively monitor student progress and track program outcomes;
- ◆ expansion of program staff; and
- ◆ efforts to develop greater consistency of approaches and accountability across YAs and Managers.

These changes will require careful and extensive management attention, as well as assessment of their individual and composite impacts during the implementation process.

- ❖ Several of these changes could have significant impacts on program enrollment, student academic progress, ability to obtain and retain jobs, and program ability to even maintain, let alone increase historic levels of retention and graduation rates. HW-SC's ongoing commitment to strengthen the existing program, assess the impact of the changes, and improve monitoring of program outcomes and accountability at all levels, will take hard work to fully implement, and will demand the full attention of Hillside leadership, HW-SC management, and the HW-SC Board. The careful implementation and evaluation of the impact of these multiple changes in 2006-07 will be instrumental in shaping the extent of the program's ability to grow and impact effectively on more students in future years.

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Contributing Staff

Although the study was directed by Donald E. Pryor, Erika Rosenberg, Rebecca Sumner and Kathiann Willis made huge contributions to the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data. Kate McCloskey provide significant technical support in producing the final report and its graphs. We also gratefully acknowledge the valuable support of CGR interns Elina Bravve, Mark Hernberg and Andrew Kurland.

PART ONE: THE CONTEXT

This report presents the findings from the third in a series of evaluation reports by CGR (Center for Governmental Research) on the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection (HW-SC). This 2007 report updates findings from the first two evaluations,¹ and also addresses questions and issues raised but not resolved in the earlier projects. An initial draft of this report was completed in November 2006 and subsequently discussed with key Hillside and HW-SC administrative leadership in January 2007. This final report incorporates some updated analyses and presentations based on new information made available in and subsequent to that discussion.

Part One of the report includes the first two chapters, the first providing the background and context, and the second summarizing the methodological approaches used in this 2006-07 project.

The report assumes reader familiarity with the HW-SC model and components, and accordingly will not include detailed descriptive information about the program. More extensive information about HW-SC can be obtained from the program or in CGR's initial 2004 evaluation report.

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Established in 1987 by Wegmans Food Markets as the Wegmans Work-Scholarship Connection, the program has experienced substantial growth over the years, and became known as the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection in 1996, when the Hillside Family of Agencies (HFA) assumed fiduciary responsibility for the

¹ See CGR, *The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection: Charting a Course for the Future*, January 2004, and "Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection: 2005 Update," presented to the Rump Group, December 2005.

program (while retaining an ongoing financial and employer partner relationship with Wegmans).

At the core of the HW-SC program model are the school-based Youth Advocates (YAs), each of whom carries a caseload of about 30 at-risk students. The YAs carry out a variety of tasks designed to help all HW-SC students acquire and develop the skills needed to be successful and to graduate from high school. The program model is predicated on the assumption that key to its ultimate success is the relationship developed and nurtured over several years between the Advocates and their students. In addition to helping students achieve academic success, a work readiness/jobs component is also an integral part of the program model, as it offers program participants the opportunity, if certain criteria are met, to be placed in a part-time job and develop employment skills. Additional program resources are devoted to helping students assess and prepare for post-secondary academic or employment opportunities. Students are also expected to attend weekly enrichment sessions on a wide variety of topics, and to participate in 20 hours of community service each year.

Initial Evaluation Findings

During 2003, CGR conducted an extensive analysis of HW-SC and its impact during the years it had been operated under HFA's oversight. That evaluation, concluded in early 2004, tracked the progress of Rochester City School District (CSD) students who had entered HW-SC in various cohorts since the first year of program operations under HFA, i.e., the 1996-97 academic year, through the 2002-03 school year. By the end of the 2002-03 year, almost 300 HW-SC students had been eligible to graduate, i.e., the 7th-, 8th-, 9th- and 10th-grade cohorts in which they had entered the program had reached their respective senior years.

In the initial evaluation, CGR tracked retention and graduation rates for those students, and compared their progress with a matched comparison sample of at-risk CSD students of comparable size and characteristics to those in the program. The initial evaluation determined that 61% of HW-SC students had graduated through the class of 2002-03, compared with only 31%

Initial evaluation findings indicated that the composite graduation rates for program students were twice what comparable at-risk students achieved without program intervention.

2005 Evaluation Update Findings

Overall graduation rates for program students admitted in 8th through 10th grades increased to 68% in the 2004 and 2005 graduating classes, but only 37% of HW-SC students entering as 7th-graders graduated.

of the comparison group students not exposed to HW-SC (over the next two years following publication of the initial report, a few additional students in both the program and comparison groups graduated, increasing the ultimate graduation rates for the initial cohorts to 64.5% and 34.1%, respectively). The initial evaluation report made a number of recommendations for strengthening the program, while concluding that the program offered a model worthy of strong continuation funding and future expansion.

As the local business community and other funders contemplated investing increasing resources into the HW-SC model, the Rump Group, made up of Rochester business leaders, commissioned CGR to undertake a two-year update of the initial evaluation, tracking the progress of two additional cohorts (graduating classes) of HW-SC students and their comparison group counterparts. More than 300 additional program participants had been in classes eligible to graduate in either 2004 or 2005, and our 2005 evaluation update tracked the retention and graduation status of those students.

The research concluded that HW-SC continued to graduate at-risk students at significantly higher rates than among comparison sample students not exposed to the program. For the 2004 and 2005 graduation years of students who had initially entered the program as 8th-, 9th- or 10th-graders, graduation rates actually increased since the initial evaluation to 68%, compared to 43% of comparison group students.

However, the conspicuous exception to the overall positive trend in the graduation rates involved students who had initially entered the program as 7th-graders. The ultimate graduation rate of students entering in 7th grade was only 37%, which was even lower than the rate for the 7th-grade comparison students (42%). This issue had not surfaced in the initial 2004 report since almost no 7th-grade admissions had yet reached their potential graduation year at the time of the initial study.

Issues Shaping 2006 Evaluation Update

The findings in the 2005 evaluation report raised several issues and concerns which Hillside wished to have addressed in this follow-up 2006-07 research project, including most importantly:

- ❖ The factors affecting the poor program and academic performance of students entering HW-SC as 7th-graders, and potential ways of addressing issues raised concerning this subset of program students;
- ❖ Reasons for significant numbers, despite the overall success rates of HW-SC, of terminations of students from the program between 10th and 12th grades, and possible interventions needed to reduce those terminations;
- ❖ Issues related to declines in academic performance and attendance among program students, particularly between 9th and 11th grades; and
- ❖ Determination of factors differentiating between, and leading indicators of, successful versus unsuccessful program participants, and how potential problems can be identified as early as possible.

Those were the primary issues shaping CGR's program evaluation work plan at the beginning of 2006, as commissioned by HFA. However, during the first quarter of the year, the focus of the planned research expanded, as a result of the interest and investment of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF) in the HW-SC model—and its assessment of the potential for expansion of the program locally and possible replication in other locations. In addition, CGR was asked to update the program graduation rate for one additional senior class, through the 2005-06 academic year.

Results from these combined research tasks were intended (1) to shed further light on the strengths, limitations and potential of the HW-SC model; (2) to provide data for funders and those responsible for program oversight to use to help strengthen the components, impact and sustainability of the program; and (3) to provide guidance concerning the program's potential to

successfully sustain growth in the Rochester area, as well as the potential for consistent replication in other sites.

The nature of this evaluation and the questions we were asked to address by definition mean that many of the findings in the report focus primarily on concerns about the program. For the most part, program strengths are assumed and are typically not emphasized in the report, given the requested focus on challenges facing the program, and potential ways to address them.

2. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

A number of research approaches were used to address the above issues. The methodologies were interrelated, and study findings and conclusions were typically based on analyses of the interactions of data from intersecting research approaches. The primary methodological approaches included:

- ❖ Updates of detailed longitudinal analyses of student outcomes through 2006, including analyses of differential outcomes by grade of student entry to the program and various other factors describing program students at admission (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, entering grade point average, identified student risk indicators). Data from the program's computerized student database were combined with Rochester City School District (RCSD) data on student outcomes. (Note: per agreement with HW-SC, Halpern students, those in the loaned executive program, and students in the smaller Syracuse component of the program are not included in any of our analyses.)
- ❖ Where comparable data existed, comparisons were made between HW-SC students and their at-risk counterparts in the comparison sample of students not in the program. That comparison sample was created as part of the initial evaluation by CGR in conjunction with the RCSD's Research, Evaluation and Testing and Management Information Systems departments. The comparison sample was determined by matching HW-SC students with similar CSD at-risk non-program students on the basis of their grade

point average, gender, race/ethnicity, poverty/socioeconomic status, academic year and grade. (For more information on the high level of comparability between the program and comparison student samples, and the resulting degree of confidence lent by the process to the ability to attribute differences in outcomes to the effects of program intervention, see CGR's 2004 report.)

Additional details of project methodology, including sample sizes, definitions and relevant assumptions, are discussed as needed in the context of presenting specific findings in subsequent chapters.

PART TWO: UPDATE OF GRADUATION RATES

Part Two of the report contains a single chapter, Chapter 3, which provides an update of HW-SC graduation rates for the 2006 senior cohort, and places those 2006 data in the context of the historical graduation rates previously reported in the first two evaluations.

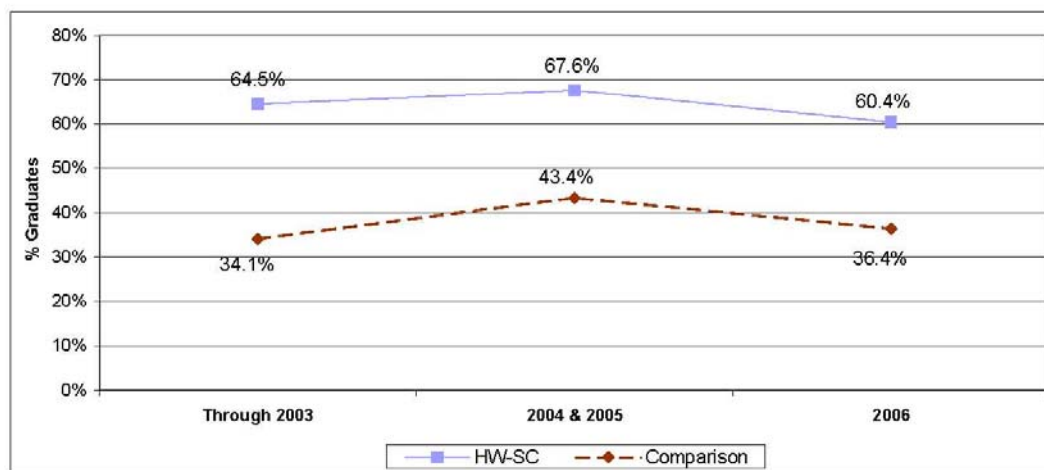
3. CLASS OF 2006 GRADUATION RATES

HW-SC Graduation Rates Continue to Significantly Exceed Comparison Rates

As shown in Figure 1, in each of CGR's three evaluations of HW-SC, at-risk students exposed to the program have continually graduated at significantly higher rates than did similar middle- and high-school students not exposed to the program (the comparison group). Figure 1 includes only students entering the program in 8th through 10th grades, and their comparison students, in order to enable direct comparisons to be made across all three evaluation periods—since, in the initial evaluation, covering graduation years through 2003, almost no students entering the program as 7th-graders had reached their potential graduation year at that point.²

² Note that, as indicated in Chapter 1, the graduation rates recorded in the initial evaluation report have been increased in Figure 1 by about 3 percentage points in both the program and comparison groups, to reflect the fact that a few additional students in both groups graduated within the next two years after the completion of the first study.

Figure 1
HW-SC and Comparison Group Graduation Rates: 2006 and Historical Rates



Note: Results include students entering in the 8th, 9th and 10th grades (and their comparison group students). 7th-grade students not included.

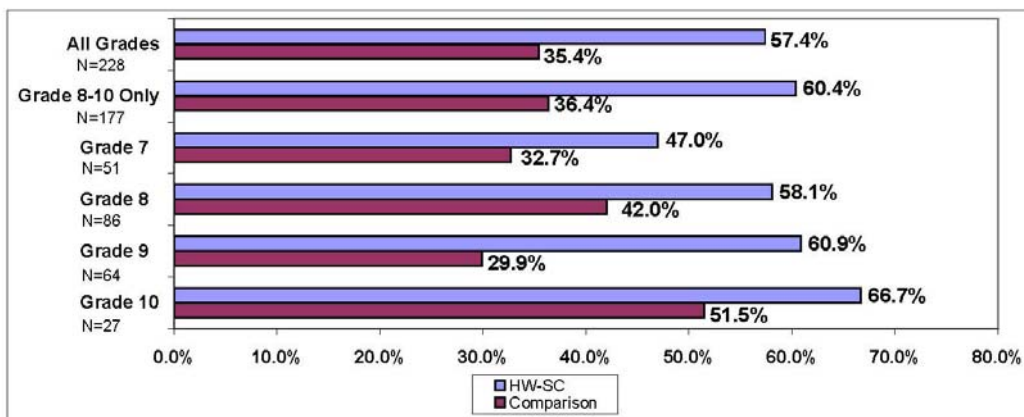
The good news about the HW-SC students in the 2006 cohort, i.e., students whose senior class was scheduled to graduate in 2006, is that *students in the program's 2006 graduating class continued the consistent pattern of graduating from high school at much higher rates than their comparison at-risk students who did not have the advantage of the HW-SC support services.* Overall, among students entering the program in grades 8 through 10, 60.4% of the class of 2006 graduated, versus 36.4% of their counterparts in the comparison sample. For each of the past three graduating classes, those in the program have graduated at rates about 24 percentage points higher than within the comparison groups—down slightly from the original 30 percentage point margin in the early years of the HW-SC program.

Students in the program continue to graduate at significantly higher rates than comparison students, regardless of entry grade.

As shown in Figure 2, when 7th-graders are included, the overall 2006 graduation rate for all entrants to the program (entering in grades 7 through 10) drops somewhat to 57.4%, compared with 35.4% of the comparison students. The overall grades 7-10 graduation rate is pulled below the 8-10 rate due to the effect of the lower graduation rate among 7th-graders (47% in 2006). Even

among 7th-graders, however, the following statement is true: within the graduating class of 2006, at each entry grade, those in the program had significantly higher graduation rates than among the comparison group students.

Figure 2
2006 HW-SC and Comparison Group Graduation Rates, by Entry Grade



Note: Ns refer to numbers of HW-SC students in each entering grade (with comparable numbers of comparison group students.)

Graduation Rates Lower than in Previous Years

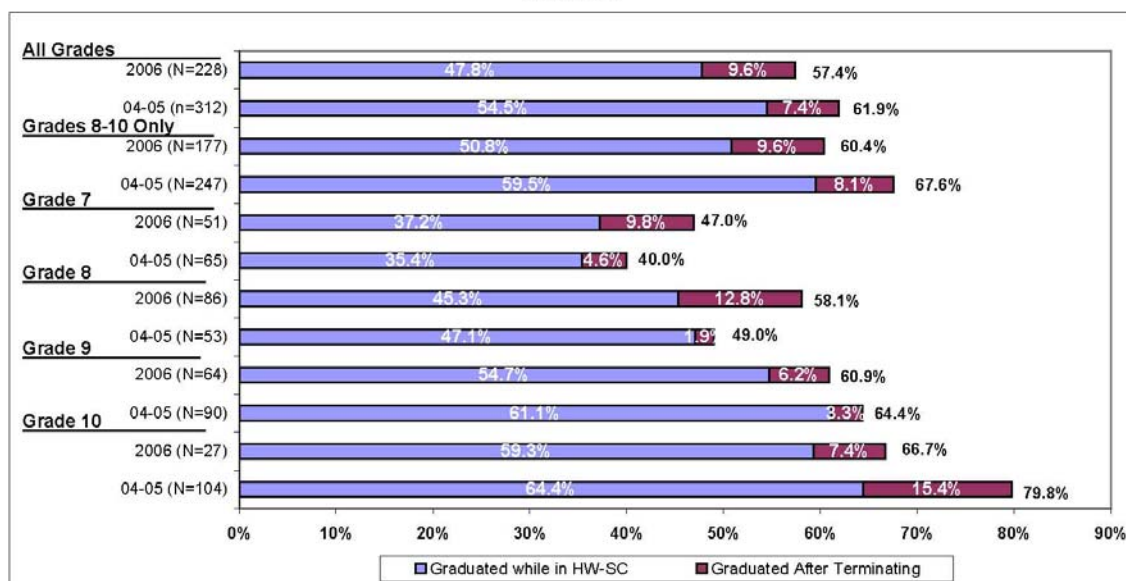
However, the news about graduation rates is somewhat less positive when the graduation rates in 2006 are compared with those of earlier years. As indicated in Figure 1, the graduation rates of students in the program reached their highest point in the two graduating classes of 2004 and 2005, when about two-thirds of all students who had entered in grades 8, 9 or 10 actually graduated. In 2006, the graduation rate of 60.4% represented the lowest 8th-through 10th-grade rate of any graduating class since CGR's evaluations of HW-SC began (though remaining well above the comparison group rate).

Moreover, as shown in Figure 3—which shows how the rates for students eligible to graduate in 2006 compared with rates for HW-SC students eligible to graduate in the previous two cohorts, in

The 2006 overall graduation rate was lower than in previous years, and below 60% for the first time.

2004 and 2005³—the overall graduation rate across all grades (those entering in grades 7 through 10) dropped in 2006 to 57.4%, down from the combined 61.9% rate in the 2004 and 2005 cohorts. The overall rate in 2006, despite remaining well above the comparison group rate, reflected the first time since CGR began evaluating HW-SC that the overall graduation rate dropped below 60%.

Figure 3
Graduation Rates for HW-SC Students Eligible to Graduate in 2006 vs. Eligible to Graduate in 2004 and 2005, By Entry Grade and Program Termination Status



The overall graduation rates for entering 9th- and 10th-graders both declined in 2006, compared with previous years. 2006 rates were higher, compared to the previous two years, among entering 7th- and 8th-grade students—but primarily as a function of including students who graduated from CSD after having previously terminated from the program.

³ The comparison with the most recent two years was determined to be the most valid and important one to make, since the program had shown an increase in graduation rates in those two years compared to earlier years, and those increases had helped expand interest in the program from various funders and community leaders. However, had we presented comparisons with any other combination of previous years, the pattern reflected in Figure 3 would have looked virtually the same.

High Proportion of Graduates Had Previously Terminated from Program

2006 had the highest proportions of graduates who had previously been terminated from the program.

In that context, it is important to note that only about half of the HW-SC students in the class of 2006 graduated while still in the program (50.8% of those who entered the program in grades 8 through 10, 47.8% of all program students from grades 7 through 10). As shown in Figure 3, 10% of all HW-SC students in the 2006 cohort graduated from the City School District only after terminating from the program. While there have always been such students in previous classes, *the numbers and proportions of HW-SC students who graduated from the District only after leaving the program was higher in 2006 than in any previous year since Hillside became responsible for the program.* Among just the graduates in the class of 2006, 17% had previously terminated from the program—compared to 12% in 2004 and 2005, and less than 5% in the years before that.

As reflected in Figure 3, if only graduates *while in the program* are considered, every entry grade had lower 2006 graduation rates than in the previous two years, with the exception of 7th-graders, where fewer than 40% of the students had graduated while in the program in any of the years. The only reason the 8th-grade *overall* graduation rate was higher in 2006 than in the previous two years is that 13% of the students in that class graduated from the District after being terminated from the program.

To put this issue of when students graduated, relative to whether or not they remained enrolled in HW-SC, in context, it should be noted that for purposes of the evaluations, students have consistently been considered participants in HW-SC if they had been enrolled in the program for seven months or more, regardless of whether or not they remained in the program for their entire high school career. Thus, any student who participates in HW-SC for eight months in 9th grade and then leaves the program but remains enrolled in the RCSD, and then goes on to graduate from high school without ever returning to HW-SC, has consistently been counted as a program graduate, even though not a program participant at the time. By the same token, a different student also enrolled in HW-SC for eight months in 9th grade and who also left the program after that time, but remained in high

school until mid-way through his/her senior year and finally dropped out of school at that time, is counted as an HW-SC non-graduate. The key variable for the purposes of our evaluations has consistently been the initial program enrollment of seven months or longer, to be included in our program sample. Beyond that, the key outcome is simply whether the student graduated, regardless of how long he/she remained in the program beyond the initial seven months.

For the first time in the life of the program, in 2006 more than half of the cohort's entering students terminated from the program without graduating; about 20% of those subsequently went on to graduate from the CSD post-program.

Accordingly, we have never made distinctions in the numbers of students who graduated while still in the program versus those who terminated and subsequently graduated from the CSD. While there is no question that these students should continue to be included with the graduate totals, it does raise some questions about the efficacy of the HW-SC model if increasing numbers of students are being terminated, even if some of them do subsequently graduate. The bottom line of the data reflected in Figure 3 is this: *For the first time in the program's existence, more than half of those admitted at some point to a potential graduating class—in this case the class of 2006—terminated from the program without graduating.* The fact that almost 20% of those terminated students ultimately graduated anyway from the CSD is the good news, but the overall increases in the proportion of terminations raise other questions.

Post-Termination Graduates in 2006 Spent Less Time in Program

Many of the 2006 post-termination high school graduates had been away from HW-SC for several years before graduating.

The parallel to this growing trend toward graduating after being terminated from HW-SC would appear to be the data presented later in Table 2 in Chapter 5 that indicate that students who were terminated from the program in the 2006 class were being terminated on average sooner than in previous years, i.e., they were not spending as much time in the program as those terminated from earlier years. The corollary to this is that about 90% of the terminated students who subsequently graduated from the CSD in previous graduating classes had reached at least their 10th-grade year in the program before terminating, including about half who had made it to their 11th- or 12th-grade years before leaving the program—whereas 41% of the “termination/graduates” in 2006 had previously left HW-SC without finishing their 9th-grade year.

With such a longer spread of time between termination from the program and subsequent graduation, the direct relationship between the program model/services, and the graduation several years later, becomes more tenuous. Nonetheless, we have continued consistently to count these students as program graduates, based on the assumption that students who graduated after being terminated from the program had received some level of support along the way from HW-SC that may have gotten them to the point where they could stay in school and graduate on their own.

Other Contributors to Lower Graduation Rates

In an attempt to explain further what contributed to the lower graduation rates in 2006, we noted that one of the reasons for the higher overall graduation rates in earlier years was the disproportionately high number of entering 10th-graders in the cohorts for those years. Since 10th-grade entrants have consistently graduated at higher rates than entrants from other grades, their large presence in the previous cohorts helped spike the overall graduation rates for those years higher than would be expected with smaller proportions of 10th-graders in the cohort. With much smaller proportions of entering 10th-graders in the 2006 cohort, the overall graduation rate was reduced in part as a result. And that is likely to be the reality as the program goes forward. *The trend has been to admit higher proportions of younger students, and the new criteria call for few admissions of 10th-graders, so the likelihood is that overall program graduation rates may continue to be lower than in 2004 and 2005, unless other changes are made to strengthen the program model to address academic supports and job placement issues raised later in the report.*

It should also be noted that 30 students in the 2006 HW-SC cohort, and 26 students in the 2006 comparison group, were still in school at the end of the summer of 2006. Some of those students may subsequently graduate and increase the reported graduation rates for 2006. However, these numbers of students still in school are comparable to the numbers in previous years, and relatively few in the past have subsequently graduated in later years (enough to add no more than one to three percentage points

to the graduation rates for a cohort). And since the numbers are similar for both program and comparison groups, the effect on the rates of both groups would be likely to be similar. Thus the treatment of these “still in school” students in our analyses is identical to treatment in previous years, and has no impact of significance on the 2006 lower graduation rates.