

# Being Smart Is Not Enough:

Easing the way on the long hard journey from urban poverty to college graduation

**A REPORT ON THE ROCCITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM 2010-2013**

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Easing the way on the long hard journey from urban poverty to college graduation

“...when you look at most inner city youth, most never see themselves in any other place... The program gave them a chance to be a part of the world. They are not building relevant relationships because of blood, but because of connections.”

**Moses Robinson**, Rochester Police Department, School Resource Officer at East High School

“Even if it's expensive, the society has a responsibility to try to provide for cultural assimilation because of the systematic destruction of minority families wrought by various policies, practices and programs of the past and present.”

**Rob Brown**, former Rochester City Schools commissioner, RocCity SCHOLARS board member

“We regarded them as our own kids, not just as students. We formed real bonds with them that continue. One of them never forgets my birthday or father’s day. It’s very sweet. We didn’t have a lot of students because you need to give them a lot of attention.”

**E. Belvin Williams**, former senior vice president for Educational Testing Services, Rosen Scholars board member, adviser to RocCity SCHOLARS

“You cannot leave them at the door.”

**Dr. Lynn Rosen**, founder, RocCity SCHOLARS

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## Executive Summary

This report describes a two-year pilot for RocCity SCHOLARS, a program for academically gifted, but disadvantaged urban high school students — students who have the intellectual tools to succeed at some of the nation’s elite colleges and universities, but who are unlikely to seek admission to those schools, and nearly as unlikely to graduate should they be enrolled.

Being smart is not enough. Often, when these very talented high school students find themselves on a college campus, they are like refugees in a strange new land, dropped into a culture that is completely foreign to them and lacking the social, cultural and financial supports they need to fit in.

RocCity SCHOLARS set out to identify four of these academically gifted students each year at Rochester’s East High School, and then to provide them with the assistance they would need, not just to gain admission to a top-tier college, but to thrive and succeed in that environment. The program identified potential scholars at the conclusion of their freshman year and committed to their support for four years, through the freshman year in college.

Among the pilot project findings discussed in this Report is the evidence that:

- There are students at even the worst-performing city high schools who could meet the academic requirements of the country’s elite colleges.
- These students are largely ignored by recruiters from top colleges because the schools do not believe they will find qualified students in high-poverty, under-performing inner city schools.
- Whatever their potential for scholarly achievements, these students face enormous challenges on the road to college graduation—not only financial, but cultural and social deficits. Most of these students not only do not have adults in their lives who can expose them to the arts, travel, intellectual challenges, and the chance to visit and explore campuses far from home, they tend to be isolated in their own neighborhoods—cut off from exposure to Rochester’s substantial cultural resources and even from part-

time jobs because the public transportation system cannot get them where they need to go when they need to be there.

- To describe these gifted, but disadvantaged students as “low-income” is to dramatically understate the obstacles they face on their way to college graduation. Imagine arriving at Cornell, or Harvard or MIT with all your belongings in a Hefty bag. In your bag, you have no laptop or tablet, no flat screen television, no dress clothes, no workout gear. Imagine that you cannot swim, but must pass a freshman swim test. Imagine that you are at the lunch table where other freshmen are discussing their summers abroad, while you have never summered anywhere but your neighborhood. These are the deficits that shake a student’s confidence and leave many feeling so isolated that they never realize a fraction of their potential.
- RocCity SCHOLARS developed a cohort of volunteer “scholar guides” (many of them suburban professionals) who worked together, mentoring students as a group, not in the traditional one-on-one method. The guides offered a kind of “surround care” approach, inviting students into their homes, spending time with them at fine restaurants and sporting events, shuttling them to college visits, engaging them in book discussions, accompanying them to galleries and theaters (preceded by intense preparation for the experiences), even taking them shopping for clothes and instructing them on the basics of maintaining a versatile, but modest wardrobe. This surround care technique was designed to fill many of the gaps in their experiences.
- It is unrealistic to expect the school district, which is overwhelmed by huge numbers of failing students with both academic and behavioral problems, to invest in either added human resources or money to support those few high-achieving students who will easily meet graduation requirements.
- The RocCity program is a developmental program, one that responds to the individuals’ unique pace and pathway toward development. Therefore, it is unrealistic to rely on grants of one-to two-year duration for support to this type of program. However, most grants are one or two years and do not guarantee support for a four-year commitment to new scholars. Another

source of financial support — probably an endowment — is needed to continue or modestly expand the program.

While the two-year pilot has run its course, the board of RocCity SCHOLARS has concluded that there are promising reasons to continue the program under new auspices and a modified design that would incorporate the following program aspects:

- A small number of elite colleges could develop a recruitment and support system to identify and guide bright students modeled after the way top colleges now identify and support gifted high school student athletes. The schools are eager to diversify their student populations and should be encouraged to recognize that the most disadvantaged students will need much more than an acceptance letter and a financial aid package to overcome the obstacles that typically force them to abandon their college dreams. Using this model of athlete recruitment, colleges could invite their top academic prospects for multiple campus visits, introducing them to the expectations of all facets of college life in a supportive and nurturing environment. The schools could engage staff or alumni in efforts to prepare promising scholars for their college careers, as the RocCity SCHOLARS guides have done. This approach would enable top colleges to achieve a more diverse student body without any compromise of their academic standards.
- By identifying this small cohort of qualified inner city students, the top colleges could address the problem of “undermatching” — wherein students fail to attend the best possible school because they lack information about those schools, about the assistance and supports open to them and how to apply.
- By increasing the enrollment of high-achieving, well-prepared disadvantaged students, the top schools would build a more egalitarian student body without compromising academic standards. These top-tier schools have long been populated by students from the most affluent and

wealthy families, although the schools have long said they want to diversify and become a portal through which the neediest students find success in life.

- Identifying and preparing these “hidden scholars” could present an opportunity for alumni groups to work more closely with their alma maters to achieve the goal of a more diverse student body.

## Overview

Great attention is being paid today to the depressing high school completion data. No doubt it is important to graduate from high school in terms of personal and national economics and the good of society at large. However, it's wrong to see high school graduation—or college admission—as the period at the end of the sentence. These are but passage points; they are not the finish line. The finish line is college graduation. And why is that so? In 2006 young adults with BA degrees earned 28 percent more than those with AA degrees and 50 percent more than those high school diplomas. A college degree does not guarantee affluence, but it puts the recipient in a far better position to achieve or maintain upper-middle class status than those without degrees.

Yet higher education today reinforces class stratification.

Seventy-four percent of those attending top-tier colleges and universities come from families with earnings in the top quartile, while only 3 percent come from families in the bottom quartile. The data show conclusively that a disproportionately large percent of young adults from working class families who, according to their test scores and GPAs, are equipped to go to college, are either not matriculating or failing to finish. As a result, they are relegated to a life of stagnant and declining wages.

Added to the economic and social access barriers is a newly identified and under reported phenomenon termed “undermatching,” meaning that a large number of high school seniors, presumptively qualified to attend first-tier four-year colleges did not do so. Instead they attended less selective four-year colleges, two-year colleges or no college at all.

One of the barriers to access to flagship colleges for high-achieving students in low economic brackets (usually in inner city schools) is the assumption on the part of higher education recruiters that they will not find high-achieving students in low-achieving, high-poverty inner city schools. Though there has been an increase



in supports offered to good students in depressed communities, the opportunities available remain unknown to most students.

There are other issues that confront bright students who might achieve admission to top-tier colleges: knowledge of college possibilities, the process for application, and the supports available. If these obstacles are overcome and the inner city scholar gains admission, the barriers to completion—issues of socialization and enculturation—come into play. The scholar encounters a strange alien world with few if any tools or signposts to meet the new challenges. These are the obstacles to college access and completion encountered by the best and brightest disadvantaged student. These are the obstacles addressed by the RocCity SCHOLARS Program presented in this report.

---August 2013

## I. Context: A National Issue

Today, top-tier colleges and universities have voiced increasing interest in attracting a more diverse student population, while maintaining their institutions' academic excellence. Addressing that goal has led to the emergence of data-based and anecdotal research, and a new awareness of the obstacles encountered in identifying, recruiting and retaining academically gifted, but disadvantaged students. These findings have been gaining attention as they highlight the exclusionary societal impact inherent in the current barriers to college access and completion. Several recent articles in the national media have reported on this phenomenon. Many top colleges actively recruit promising low-income high school juniors and seniors, and frequently offer very generous financial packages, but offer little else by way of preparation or support for those students. As you can read in the writings quoted here, many of these gifted students do not complete college. The need for earlier well designed developmental intervention and support, as provided through programs like the RocCity SCHOLARS Program, is critical.

- *The New York Times*, March 12, 2012 ["The Reproduction of Privilege"](#), op-ed column by Thomas B. Edsall "Instead of serving as a springboard to social mobility as it did for the first decades after World War II, college education today is reinforcing class stratification, with a huge majority of the 24 percent of Americans aged 25 to 29 currently holding a bachelor's degree coming from families with earnings above the median income. Seventy-four percent of those now attending colleges that are classified as 'most competitive,' a group that includes schools like Harvard, Emory, Stanford and Notre Dame, come from families with earnings in the top income quartile, while only three percent come from families in the bottom quartile. Anthony Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce and co-author of 'How Increasing College Access Is Increasing Inequality, and What to Do about It,' puts it succinctly: 'The education system is an increasingly powerful mechanism for the intergenerational reproduction of privilege.' "

- *The New York Times*, July 31, 2013, ["Elite Colleges Differ on How They Aid Poor"](#) "Most of the top private colleges rely on nonprofit groups like Questbridge and the Posse Foundation to help them find promising disadvantaged students. However, some recruit heavily that way while others only take one or two students per year. And some elite institutions, like Washington University, do not work with such groups. For colleges that have the resources, another factor is how willing they are to spend the money to hunt for those applicants, and the much larger amount needed to help lower-income students go to a \$60,000-a-year college. In addition, poor students face bigger challenges to remain enrolled and colleges often spend money on support services for them."
- National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, Jan. 9, 2013. ["Elite colleges struggle to recruit smart low-income kids "](#) Researchers found that the "majority of academically gifted low-income students come from a handful of places in the country: About 70 percent of them come from 15 large metropolitan areas. These areas often have highly regarded public high schools, such as Stuyvesant in New York City or Thomas Jefferson in the Washington, D.C., area... The reasons are straightforward: These schools boast top teachers and immense resources. They have terrific guidance counselors. Highly selective colleges send scouts to these schools to recruit top talent. And perhaps most important, students in these schools are part of a peer group where many others are also headed to highly selective colleges."
- *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2013, ["Graduates from low-performing D.C. schools face tough college road"](#) "Johnathon Carrington grew up on the sixth floor of a low-income D.C., apartment complex, a building most recently in the news for a drive-by shooting that injured 13. His parents told him early on that education could be his escape, and Carrington took them at their word. He graduated Friday as the valedictorian of his neighborhood school, Dunbar High, and against all

odds is headed to Georgetown University. But Carrington, 17, is nervous, and so are his parents. What if Dunbar—where truancy is chronic and fewer than one-third of students are proficient in reading—didn't prepare him for the rigors of college? What if he isn't ready? It's a valid concern. Past valedictorians of low-performing District high schools say their own transitions to college were eye-opening and at times ego-shattering, filled with revelations that—despite taking their public schools' most difficult classes and acing them—they were not equipped to excel at the nation's top colleges.”

- *The New York Times*, March 29, 2013, ["A simple way to send poor kids to top colleges"](#) "...basic information can substantially increase the number of low-income students who apply to, attend and graduate from top colleges. Among a control group of low-income students with SAT scores good enough to attend top colleges—but who did not receive the information packets—only 30 percent gained admission to a college matching their academic qualifications. Among a similar group of students who did receive a packet, 54 percent gained admission, according to the researchers, Caroline M. Hoxby of Stanford and Sarah E. Turner of the University of Virginia.”
- *The New York Times*, December 22, 2012, ["For Many Poor Students, Leap to College Ends in a Hard Fall"](#) Angelica Gonzales, Melissa O'Neal and Bianca Gonzalez, three teens from an impoverished high school in Galveston, Texas, worked hard to get into good colleges. “Angelica, a daughter of a struggling Mexican immigrant, was headed to Emory University. Bianca enrolled in community college, and Melissa left for Texas State University, President Lyndon B. Johnson's alma mater. ‘It felt like we were taking off, from one life to another,’ Melissa said. ‘It felt like, Here we go!’ Four years later, their story seems less like a tribute to upward mobility than a study of obstacles in an age of soaring economic inequality. Not one

of them has a four-year degree. Only one is still studying full time, and two have crushing debts. Angelica, who left Emory owing more than \$60,000, is a clerk in a Galveston furniture store. Each showed the ability to do college work, even excel at it. But the need to earn money brought one set of strains, campus alienation brought others, and ties to boyfriends not in school added complications. With little guidance from family or school officials, college became a leap that they braved without a safety net.”

## **II. Meeting the challenge: The RocCity SCHOLARS Program**

RocCity SCHOLARS, founded by Dr. Lynn Rosen, a retired college dean, accepted its inaugural class of four scholars, rising sophomores from Rochester's East High School, in summer of 2010. The two-year pilot program, open only to East students, was to accept a cohort of four students each year. The scholars would be among students identified as academically gifted, potentially capable of success at an elite college or university, yet seriously disadvantaged, not just financially, but socially and culturally.

Unlike other programs for disadvantaged urban students, RocCity SCHOLARS focused on a small population of exceptionally gifted scholars, not those in need of remediation, and sought to expose them to a wide range of social settings and cultural activities to help close the experience gap that would surely distance them from the more privileged students they would meet at college. The premise is that even brilliant urban students may not succeed in top-shelf academic settings if they come to feel isolated and uncomfortable because of what they see as insurmountable deficits in their life experiences. Indeed, a high percentage of urban students do not make it through the freshman year for that reason. Scholars were expected to participate in the program for four years, from their sophomore year in high school through their freshman year in college, where a variety of RCS assistance could ease the transition to college life and support them until they are settled comfortably on a path to graduation.

RocCity SCHOLARS hoped to expand beyond East High School at the conclusion of the pilot program, but for policy and financial reasons, will not do so.

Two students, Darius and Liza, graduated from East High School in June 2013 with plans to attend college in September. Darius selected St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y., and plans to major in mathematics, minor in education and play football. Liza chose the University of Rochester, where she plans to major in English and pursue a career in writing. (It should be noted here that for health reasons, Liza has delayed her freshman year by one semester.) RocCity SCHOLARS

will, as promised, continue to support Darius and Liza through their freshman year at college.

The two-year life of RocCity SCHOLARS, while short-lived and with too few students to yield data to reliably assess its achievements, was nevertheless a valuable exercise in action research—producing a rich stream of observations and reflections on its practices. There are limits to this approach, but the lessons learned from the pilot are important and the reason for this report.

Perhaps the most profound assessment of the disadvantages confronting urban youth in poverty came from Rochester Police Officer Moses Robinson, the East High school resource officer: “They are never engaged in anything beyond their neighborhoods; their world is the school, their home and the corner store.”

While RocCity SCHOLARS intentionally engaged students in a wide range of activities and experiences, *the key to its success was less the content of the events than the relationships among scholar guides and scholars.* Scholar guides were the heart of the program. The guides (all community-based volunteers) were city and suburban adults from a variety of professional and life backgrounds who shared many hours with the scholars, collectively mentoring them through their high school years.

For the scholars, the RCS experience was the first time adults outside their immediate families and neighborhoods had taken a personal interest in their success. The importance of these relationships cannot be overstated. The board and the guides believed strongly in the potential of each scholar and used multiple settings and approaches to open their eyes to a world of opportunities. Through RocCity SCHOLARS, guides and scholars alike explored and came to understand a world they had never before visited.

## A. Program Model: The Rosen Scholars

The Rosen Scholars program, a New York City-based program, also founded by Dr. Lynn Rosen, provided the model for the RocCity program. The New York City program was open to students at two Manhattan high schools—Martin Luther King Jr. HS and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis HS—from 1994 to 1997. Like RocCity SCHOLARS, its purpose was to identify young scholars with outstanding potential, but with the cultural and social disadvantages that could sidetrack them on the road to success.

Eight Rosen Scholars were selected in total. The board struggled initially with the selection process; the first scholar left the program, although she did complete a college degree and has a successful teaching career. Soon the board realized that bringing on one scholar at a time was not a good idea and began to add two at a time — so the scholars would share the experience with another and not become isolated in a program populated by adults. The final six scholars successfully completed the program, graduated college (including Middlebury, University of Virginia, New York University and Williams) and went on to graduate school.

There were some differences between the New York and Rochester initiatives:

- The Rosen Scholars program accepted students at the end of their sophomore, rather than freshman year in high school. The Rosen program supported students for three years; the RocCity program for four years.
- While funding for an expanded Rosen Scholars program would eventually have become a problem, the program was entirely funded by the Rosen family through its years of operations.
- Thanks largely to the New York City transit system, Rosen Scholars could more easily than RocCity SCHOLARS get themselves to cultural, social and arts events. Transportation was never an issue for the Rosen Scholars.
- In New York, the Rosen Scholars board members served as mentors; there were no scholar guides. The New York City program stopped accepting students after the death of one board member and after two others left the



area. It was thought then that continued intensive mentoring would be too much for the remaining board members.

In 2000 the Rosen Scholars program results were reviewed and evaluated by graduate students and faculty at the Teaching College at Columbia University.

Among the implications researchers described in that report:

- Programs sponsorship was “on-going, interactive and student-centered, rather than program-centered.”
- “The program deviated from other mentor programs by providing participants with an array of mentors rather than designating one mentor.”
- The program disregarded and demonstrated the failure of the common wisdom that students benefit most from trained mentors who share similar racial, class, gender and social characteristics
- The program stressed academic skills, but also critical-thinking skills.
- Over time, the sponsors’ behavior had a sustained impact on the participants’ academic and social development.

Among the “indicators of success” noted in that report were:

- Easier transition to college—students themselves say so; also the support and influence of the mentors clearly directed the scholars to prestigious schools (even though most required some loans) and encouraged them to get liberal arts degrees rather than take a skills-based program for less tuition.
- Better placement—at higher level colleges.
- Enhanced adaptability—students seemed to adapt both to the high-pressure academic environment and to the social demands.
- Meaningful long-term relationships with mentors and guides.

“In summary,” the researchers concluded, “the Rosen Scholars Program’s successes and failures stemmed from the extreme attention paid to the social and cultural details of the students’ lives. Sponsorship entailed active attention and

involvement in most aspects of the youths' academic and cultural existence. The provision of small necessities and key comfort items clearly enhances the students' transition from public urban high school to elite four-year colleges...some of the generationally-bound lessons provided about fine arts, literature and manners may have been a bit irritating to the students, although they did not seem to have made them less respectful of or grateful for their Rosen sponsors."

"We regarded them as our own kids, not just as students," says E. Belvin Williams, a Rosen Scholars advisory board member and a former senior vice president for Educational Testing Services (the parent organization of both the SAT exam and Advanced Placement courses). "We formed real bonds with them that continue. One of them never forgets my birthday or father's day. It's very sweet. We didn't have a lot of students because you need to give them a lot of attention."

The relationships between board members and scholars were key to success, Dr. Williams says. "We had dinners with the whole group at a restaurant across from the Museum of Natural History," he says. "The main thing was to have a discussion. Many had never had a family discussion at dinner. They had to learn to ask about experiences and points of view and to feel comfortable sharing."

"I think in public schools, sometimes, we've lost some part of what learning means," Dr. Williams says. "It is academic, of course, but also social, psychological and emotional. You need to understand what the kid is going through."

"I think in public schools, sometimes, we've lost some part of what learning means. It is academic, of course, but also social, psychological and emotional. You need to understand what the kid is going through."

The Rosen Scholars board and Dr. Rosen understood that there is no shortcut to the time it takes to build the relationships young people need to slowly imagine the life they want to make for themselves.

“They became like a second family to me,” says former Rosen Scholar Stacey Li. “I never would have thought about Middlebury College without them. It was a unique set up, not one person (as a mentor), but a whole group of mentors. They read with us and discussed books. They took us to cultural events, gave us so many social and cultural opportunities.”

Ms. Li was born in China and emigrated to New York City with her parents and brother when she was seven. Her parents spoke little English and were too poor to offer her many opportunities or to steer her towards an elite college like Middlebury in Vermont.

“We all had swimming lessons on Saturday,” she explains. “We had private tutors for the SATs. We went to shows at Carnegie Hall. I had never been out to a fancy restaurant. I grew up in a bubble in Chinatown.

“They really did care. They were hands-on . . . Dr. Rosen drove me to Middlebury. They helped me make my bed. I always had access to her and to other mentors. I still call her on Mothers Day and her birthday.”

Ms. Li says the Rosen Scholars experience shaped her life in important ways. She went on to earn a Masters degree in social work from Columbia University and now works at a New York City settlement house as director of social work for Head Start. “Parents would tell me that they want their children in the program and they would say that 25 years ago they were in the program,” she says. “I would think, ‘if you’re bringing your children in, somehow we failed you.’ So we started a college access and success program for the parents. We raised \$1 million last year and \$1 million this year (government and private donors). Next year we’ll have 25 parents in college. This year we have eight.” Her hope is to help struggling young parents to acquire the education they need to offer their own children the kind of experiences she had thanks to the Rosen Scholars.

## B. The RocCity SCHOLARS Approach

### 1. Design

A two-year pilot was inaugurated in the spring of 2010. Its purpose was to identify exceptionally gifted scholars with the academic prowess to succeed in elite colleges, but who might not thrive in those schools because they lack the social and cultural experiences and skills of more privileged students.

This focus on *high-achieving scholars with numerous social and cultural disadvantages* distinguished the RocCity SCHOLARS from other Rochester area programs that assist low-income, urban students. Other programs, however well-designed and successful, are typically intended to provide remedial help to needy, academically-struggling students and/or to assist them in finding employment, training, or college admission. There are also mentoring programs for disadvantaged urban students, but these typically pair a student with one caring adult for support and guidance. The RocCity model employed a collaborative approach, with multiple “scholar guides” serving as mentors, each of them bringing their own interests, expertise and life skills to their interactions with all of the scholars in the program. This team approach worked well with the Rosen Scholars program in New York City and was central to the RocCity program as well.

RocCity SCHOLARS was started at Rochester’s East High School, selected because it offered a range of Advanced Placement courses and because a memorial fund at the school would provide money for scholar-related expenses such as college trips, clothing, computers, transportation, etc.

The goal was to select four rising sophomores each year. Candidates would have to hold and maintain a GPA of at least 3.5 (out of 4.0), would have to be recommended by teachers and counselors and would have to be

interviewed by RocCity SCHOLARS board members. The program committed to four years of supports for its scholars, carrying them through the first year of college, which is a difficult transition in the best of circumstances, and a time when many disadvantaged students struggle both academically and socially, often leaving school.

Students selected for the RCS program would receive tutoring and testing through the Sylvan Learning Center in Pittsford, with services customized for the academic needs of each student — designed to improve performance outcomes and to prep scholars for the SAT and ACT exams. Dr. Rosen alerted the Sylvan tutors weekly to the current academic needs of the scholars, and sessions were planned accordingly.

The RCS board recruited scholar guides (successful teachers, doctors, administrators, etc.) who would jointly mentor the scholars. The guides met regularly with the scholars, sometimes discussing literary works they read simultaneously and helping them break down and analyze the texts, dining with them in white-tablecloth restaurants and at the Guides' homes, accompanying them on college visits, meeting with them before Sylvan sessions, accompanying them to sporting events and cultural activities (including, but not limited to, the Rochester City Ballet, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Geva Theater Center, the Rochester Museum and Science Center, the Memorial Art Gallery, and Garth Fagan Dance). Often the guides and scholars met as a group for a meal or other activities to build a sense of community and to enjoy the simple pleasures of conversation.

According to the program design, the scholars selected at the conclusion of their freshman year took part in numerous activities during that summer. Before the start of their sophomore year, students were tutored to prepare for the PSAT exam; they chose two books (from a list of books being read at top high schools across the country) and read and discussed those books

with scholar guides or other scholars; they participated in a vocabulary-building program.

During that first summer, scholars were offered swimming experiences (and those who did not swim were given instruction). The goal was to build the scholars' "social self assurance." They attended at least one sporting event with guides and dined out with scholar guides three times. They traveled out of Rochester at least once to experience a sporting or cultural event.

The scholars also spent time that first summer visiting artists in their local studios and writing reports on their activities—constructed to help them develop critical thinking skills. (*For a detailed list of RCS activities, see the "RocCity SCHOLARS Program," Appendix ii at the end of this report.*)

The RCS program was carefully structured to help young scholars see worlds they had never imagined from the confines of their neighborhood, to help them think critically with open minds, to help them plan their futures in a systematic way, to help them connect to people and institutions that can help them achieve their personal goals, and to give them the tools to comfortably present themselves to others and to advocate for themselves.

"The RCS program was carefully structured to help young scholars see worlds they had never imagined from the confines of their neighborhood."

The program accepted four students in 2010 and for financial reasons, just two in 2011. Of the six scholars admitted to the program, two graduated from East High School in June 2013. RocCity SCHOLARS will support them, as promised, through their first year in college, but will accept no more students.

The cost of the program — several thousand dollars per year per student — is high and without a permanent funding source, the board concluded that it could not guarantee supports to additional students. With additional students, however, the per capita costs would come down somewhat— with several students taking the same college visit, for example, or traveling in the same vehicle to tutoring sessions.

## **2. The Process**

### **a. Selecting the scholars**

To be considered for the RocCity SCHOLARS program, a student was required to have achieved at least a 3.5 unweighted GPA at the conclusion of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition, students had to present recommendations from teachers and then impress RCS board members as viable candidates during an interview. There was another, albeit intangible, criterion. The board looked for students whose combination of needs the program seemed best designed to meet.

The interview process was somewhat intuitive. The board looked for a “spark”—something to distinguish the candidate from the field. The board sought students with great potential as scholars, those who—with the necessary supports—could become leaders in their chosen fields of endeavor. They sought students who displayed confidence, but who were not over-confident. They looked for students who seemed most capable of mastering the social and interpersonal skills they would need to become advocates for themselves in college and beyond. And they wanted to bring in students who did not have access to mentors and other supports elsewhere.

In the spring of 2010, four candidates were selected based on those criteria. Only Darius successfully completed the high school portion of the program.

In 2011, for financial reasons, the board recruited just two students to finish the pilot program. One of those, Liza, graduated early, in 2013, and completed the high school side of the RCS program.

In the initial class of four, two students (despite very high GPAs) tested so far below grade level in reading that they were dropped immediately. A fourth student left the program, unable to keep up with its academic demands—in part, perhaps, because of family-related problems.

In 2011, the second student selected believed his baseball skills would be his ticket to success and he, too, fell behind. He had little time for after-school activities so integral to the RCS model and he left the program.

It was clear that the GPA was not a reliable indicator of academic prowess. So the RCS board used the California Achievement Test, administered by the Sylvan Learning Center, to better gauge students' critical learning skills in relation to high-performing students in the national pool.

Both Darius and Liza initially tested above grade level on the CAT and both made dramatic improvements during their first year with RocCity SCHOLARS.

### **Darius**

Darius was selected as a RocCity Scholar in the spring of 2010, at the end of his freshman year at East High School in Rochester. He was 14.

He is one of his mother's six sons. One brother has been missing for several years; another is in prison and a third is in the U.S. military. Darius is the



only one of his siblings to graduate high school. His parents live separately, and Darius lives with his father, who has two daughters.

He was recommended to the board because he is both very bright and hard-working. He is not one to ever let an assignment slide. During his interview, however, he presented a decided lack of self-confidence. He rarely looked a questioner in the eye, and answered questions with as few words as possible. He arrived in a black hoody, covering his head; his shoulders were hunched forward as if to compact his torso to make himself less visible. He asserted himself only once, says board member Carolyn Friedlander, when he announced that if there were to be questions about his family life, he would leave the interview immediately. Gradually, she says, Darius began to open up to the scholar guides he met with regularly, displaying a considerable poise and also trust in a group of adults he would, save for RCS, never have engaged.

Darius' initial reticence, like that of other students interviewed, was no doubt partly due to the fact that he was 14, that he was in a new situation and talking to strangers—all of whom live in a world very different from his own. But that's why identifying the best candidates for RCS was both so difficult and so important. Without the supports and relationships RCS shared with Darius, it is highly unlikely that he would ever have found his way to St. Lawrence University (or even thought twice about it as a good college fit for him), that he would have successfully negotiated a significant financial aid package or that he would have become the young man who presents himself so well today.

There was always something different about Darius. His EHS guidance counselor says his “spark” shone brightly when he was just a freshman. He has high expectations for himself and was not afraid to set goals. He has always said he'd like to become a math teacher and work in a school like East High.

He is a football player (who will play for the Division III St. Lawrence team) who said as a freshman that he hoped to play for the University of Southern California Trojans in college; he wanted to play at a great football school and to study far from Rochester. He was looking forward to a college adventure, not just a high school diploma.

Darius worked at Greece Ridge Mall during the summer after his sophomore year. Through the RCS he found a job as a computer assistant. He came to work the first day in a shirt and tie, and the supervisor told him that the work environment is casual and a tie is not necessary. But he came with a tie every day.

His East High football coach, Paul Brigandi, says Darius always worked hard and always wanted to learn how to improve. “He was 2<sup>nd</sup> team AGR (All Greater Rochester), 4<sup>th</sup> Team All-State, defensive player of the year for 2012 in the Rochester City Athletic Conference,” Mr. Brigandi says. He played anywhere he was needed—receiver, running back, long snapper, punter.

“When he was just a freshman,” says his counselor, Sherylanne Diodato, Darius “was so concerned about his grades. I think it was the first marking period, and I said to him that he should have a 4.0. But because of the way the district weights grades, it was a little below that. And he was devastated. But he has always kept that stamina. He had the drive to do well.”

Football seemed to help him address other challenges in the same methodical, aggressive way.

Brad Rosen, the lawyer for RCS and an occasional scholar guide, took Darius shopping for clothes. “He really had never been before. I went to a prep school and knew that the prep look is very adaptable. I nudged him in that

direction. I explained that it's part of the game, putting on a role," Mr. Rosen says.

Darius understood. "If you get so far as an interview, you have to know how to do things that will make that first impression," Mr. Rosen says he explained. Darius "had never tied a tie or contemplated buying one—why would he? I did it for him and he learned how to do it."

Mr. Rosen, a former scholastic football player, understood Darius' love for the game and also its fine points. "He is very intelligent and very intuitive; he has very good instincts for the ball. He knew how to do what he had to do to play the game. Once he realized there are other games with other rules, he knew he could play and he had a desire to learn."

"Once he realized there are other games with other rules, he knew he could play and he had a desire to learn."

Mr. Rosen, an entertainment lawyer, explained to Darius that he once represented a Reggae group. "When they were negotiating with a promoter, they would dress well, speak with a British accent. Back in Jamaica, they spoke Patois. I couldn't understand a word." The point, he said, is that Darius is learning to live in two worlds—the one where he was raised and the other where he hopes to live as a successful professional—and he has the intuition and the skill to move from one to the other as circumstances dictate. It's an important skill and football has helped him appreciate the gamesmanship that factors into many social relationships and protocols.

He recognized as a high school freshman that he had social deficits he wanted to overcome, says Ms. Diodato. He was, like other scholars, perplexed by the array of cutlery at each place setting in upscale restaurants. But he was eager to understand proper etiquette; he is a quick study who never hesitates to ask questions or seek advice when he feels he

needs it. He listened to scholar guides who taught him how to dress for the occasion, reminded him repeatedly to greet strangers with a firm handshake and a smile, and who practiced with him the art of conversation.

While he had no experience whatsoever with the arts before his selection as a RocCity Scholar, Darius welcomed the opportunity to sample Rochester's cultural highlights. "He went to the ballet," Ms. Diodato says, "and the next day I asked him, 'What did you think?' He said he loved it and he began to show me steps"—to explain the athleticism involved in dance, something he had never appreciated before.

RocCity SCHOLARS filled a real need for Darius, says Ms. Diodato. "I'm big on social and cultural capital, on networking. RocCity SCHOLARS really helped with that," she says. "I asked him what makes you different (from others in his family). He said, 'I made good choices. I looked for people who could be good supports for me.' He speaks almost reverently about Dr. Rosen. He doesn't want to let her down. He's so thankful."

Darius often worked in his counselor's office after school to prepare his college applications. That reticent 14-year-old was long gone by the start of the application process, she says.

"He would call schools and ask for the director of admissions or the dean. I let him go. I want (students) to take ownership at a certain point," Ms. Diodato says. "He couldn't have done that two or three years ago. I heard him talking to coaches who were trying to persuade him to go to schools he didn't want to attend. He asked questions and he really stood up to them."

Darius says that while he would have found his way to college without RCS, his choices would have been fewer. Dr. Rosen and the scholar guides helped him look at and visit colleges that were not on his radar screen before—not just St. Lawrence, but Rutgers University.

The program, he says, also taught him how to stay on top of his studies. “I learned to find a two-hour period every day, sometimes before or after football practice or Sylvan. I made sure I had a block of time. Sylvan taught me to keep a calendar, to be organized about my time.

“Football taught me to be disciplined,” Darius says. “It taught me order, kept me regulated. It helps me get out the anger.”

Although he abandoned his boyhood dream of playing football at USC, he has not lowered his expectations for himself at all. He has a more mature understanding of his football abilities and of the role sports should play in his life. He has discovered his real strengths, both academic and social, and is determined to put them to good use.

### **Liza**

Scholar guides who worked with Liza generally describe her as a “brilliant” student, capable of insight beyond her years and able to express herself in fluid, graceful prose.

Liza was selected as a RocCity Scholar at the conclusion of her freshman year in the spring of 2011. She was able to accelerate her high school program and graduated a year ahead of schedule, in June 2013.

In many ways, Liza was an ideal RocCity SCHOLARS candidate, yet she does not fit the stereotypical expectations for a disadvantaged urban student. She is not minority. She does not live in one of the poorest city neighborhoods. And while her parents certainly are not affluent, both went to college and Liza lives in an intact nuclear family.

But she is a student who, without the RCS intervention, would have been far less likely to achieve admission, let alone substantial financial aid, at the University of Rochester (which she decided to attend) and Sarah Lawrence College, where she was also accepted and awarded a scholarship. She

would never have applied to and visited Barnard, Columbia, SUNY Purchase and Sarah Lawrence.

Like Darius, she had no prior experience of the city's numerous cultural institutions, had rarely traveled outside Rochester, had limited social experiences and had not learned to present herself with poise and confidence.

During her interview with the RCS board, Liza was withdrawn and appeared introverted. Her hair covered half her face and she could not look the adults in the eye. She spoke so softly that board members had to ask her to speak up. She was uncomfortable in the situation, but she did have that spark the board also saw in Darius. On political matters, on subjects involving social and economic justice, she had strong opinions and was able to give them voice despite her otherwise timid demeanor.

When she was selected for the program, Dr. Rosen says, Liza "was one of the greatest challenges we could take on, but she was one of the most brilliant students we've seen. She was reading Susan Sontag at 15. She was highly opinionated, but very narrow in her thinking. Her literary interests were confined (to subjects and writers who conformed to her views). The goal was to open her up, not to change her opinions."

"During her interview with the RCS board, Liza was withdrawn and appeared introverted. Her hair covered half her face and she could not look the adults in the eye. She spoke so softly that board members had to ask her to speak up."

RCS, Dr. Rosen says, was interested only in exposing her to other views and pushing her to become a more critical and analytical thinker. Liza had the raw material; she just needed the tools to shape it. As a freshman, she had

no interest in the Harry Potter novels, but was reading James Joyce and Samuel Becket.

Liza says she is very grateful for the RCS experience and especially enjoyed her visits to Garth Fagan Dance. But she says that what she most values about her time in the program was the interaction with the scholar guides. She reports that she welcomed hearing their life stories and the assessments of books or activities they shared with the scholars. “Talking to Dr. Rosen and the others, they’ve been to so many places and done so many things,” Liza says. “It was really enjoyable to hear their stories.”

Liza says she has been writing since early in childhood and has focused on a writing career for at least five years. She sees herself one day as a writer of novels, or perhaps of stories for a publication such as *The New Yorker*. Her parents always nurtured her interest in writing. “I have always loved to come up with characters,” she says.

She is very much tuned into political affairs and to a range of social justice issues. More recently, she says, she has considered writing in support of those causes—for print or online publications or organizations.

“Writing,” Liza says, “can be done by anybody. I could be a farmer and still be a writer.” So the particulars of a career are less important to her than the writing. “I want to effect change through my writing.”

Her writing demonstrates insight, but also self-awareness. Consider this excerpt from an essay Liza wrote on American novelist and short story writer William Burroughs:

*“I had approached autobiographical literature with scorn. I saw it as little more than a narcissistic invitation to the author’s pity-party, and would never have considered it myself. These novels changed my perspective...I applied this new way of thinking to write about a friend’s suicide as a series*

*of surreal vignettes; a conflict with my significant other became an absurd look at the dynamics of conversation. Even a disappointing road trip, I found, could be made into something like a description of the effects on people of light in December...This creative insight necessarily led to an altered worldview. If I saw everything I experienced as a potential subject for my writing, I found I was more likely to pay close attention to my encounters."*

Here is her clear-eyed assessment of life in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America written after a visit to Genesee Country Village and Museum in Mumford:

*"While many people claim that they would prefer life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for its simplicity and lack of complications, I would tend to disagree. Life in the modern world is undeniably too complicated; the material preoccupation and emotional demands of our fast-paced and changing world can be overwhelming...But from a sociopolitical perspective, the modern world is vastly improved from the one represented by the Genesee Country Village...many things have been altered through the struggle in the interest of minorities. African Americans have fought for and gained an equal position, women have gotten the vote, a variety of religions are widely accepted and gays are no longer as marginalized."*

This is a student with both a facility for language and a deepening appreciation for the nuances and contradictions that are central to the human experience. Like Darius, she would certainly have pursued a college degree if she had not been selected as a RocCity Scholar. But as Liza says in assessing the value of the program to her: "I am better prepared and able to interact. It broadened my horizons. I'm more confident, and I have a greater sense of responsibility. I would not be as effective an advocate for myself, and wouldn't have been able to get the financial aid I got."



## b. Scholar Activities

Central to the Roc City SCHOLARS experience were the numerous social and cultural outings that served several distinct purposes:

- Gave the scholars opportunities to glimpse the world beyond the narrow confines of school and neighborhood. Most of these students had never been to a concert or to the Museum and Science Center, let alone a fancy restaurant or flown in an airplane.
- Gave them a chance to learn about the many ways arts are important to deepening the understanding of the human predicament.
- Encouraged them to think critically and to develop a deeper facility with the written word (they were required to write about most experiences).
- Built their comfort with and tolerance for the new experiences that would be part of their college lives.

Most of these activities were carefully documented and evaluated by scholar guides and scholars to help the board assess their value and make improvements to future outings.

**Academic Advancement:** As soon as they were named RocCity SCHOLARS, students were given summer reading expectations—beginning the process of encouraging them to pick up challenging works of literature and to read them critically, for the sheer joy of reading. No papers. No tests. Just simple conversation. (See outlines of the curriculum and activities, *Appendix i* at the end of this document.)

At the start of his junior year, Darius and another scholar (who dropped out of the program) chose books they'd like to read with Professor Ron Herzman, who teaches literature at the State University College in Geneseo. Darius chose *Beowulf*, the epic old-English poem about a Nordic hero, Beowulf, who destroys Grendel, a monster. There is no question, Professor Herzman says, that Darius comprehended the tale and themes of heroism and courage.

But their meetings were not purely literary, Herzman says. Most often the scholars met the professor and one of his college students at a Geneseo coffee shop, where the conversations were free-wheeling and the scholars got a taste of college life. That was, of course, by design—a book discussion that would be the backdrop for a mini-college experience.

The scholar guides also read books with the scholars—not always literary classics, but also contemporary releases such as *The Hunger Games* and *Friday Night Lights*. The reading was central, but so, too, the discussion—often in coffee shops, or at the (suburban) home of one of the guides. The book dialogues allowed the scholars to identify their own literary preferences, and to feel comfortable with their own tastes and with rejecting some titles that didn't engage them.

These discussions also facilitated visits to suburban Rochester neighborhoods the scholars had never seen up close. These home get-togethers were occasions for the scholars to better get to know successful adults who genuinely cared for them—people who could help them understand and navigate social circles that were foreign to them.

**Enculturation:** While the scholars visited many Rochester arts organizations, a few examples illustrate how powerful these experiences can be.

Geva's "Page to Stage" program is designed to engage Rochester area high school students in a play's life cycle from the first reading of the script to the final production. RocCity SCHOLARS took part in the program for Geva's 2011 run of Tom Dudzick's *Over the Tavern*, a play about a struggling 1950s Buffalo family living over the family bar.

None of the RocCity SCHOLARS had experienced anything similar to the "Page to Stage" taste of theater. After reading the script, they attended

rehearsals, interacted with the cast, and, after each visit, had to write answers to three questions posed to help them deconstruct the play and think about what it says about the human predicament.

“For these kids, the major aha moment was the ‘why’ — why we picked this play, why we put it in this part of the season, and where does art fit into your life,” says Skip Greer, Geva’s Director of Education, Artist in Residence and director of “Over the Tavern.”

“When the (scholars) first came, you couldn’t get them to talk, and if they did speak, you couldn’t hear them,” Mr. Greer says. “Then you see them come alive, talking to the cast, expressing their opinions. It’s important when we talk about the design of the production that they get the metaphor of the play. That’s what you carry out with you.”

Mr. Greer and Eric Evans, Geva’s Education Administrator, agree the scholars seemed to gain self-confidence as they dug deeper into the production.

The goal of “Page to Stage” is to help students see how a play, on different levels, relates to human experience. “The theater can be cracked open and you find you need math skills, analytical skills—everything feeds into it,” Mr. Evans says.

“Once the mystery is removed, there is a comfort level that makes the watching and reading of plays more enjoyable and meaningful,” Mr. Greer says.

It’s particularly rewarding when a student begins to think along with the actors, getting inside their heads to deal with a production challenge. During the performance, two actors playing brothers living over the tavern have an animated exchange. On one occasion, one actor, waving a packet of papers in his hand, lost his grip so that the papers fell from the second

“floor” down to the first—a mistake. Darius had seen several rehearsals and knew that the packet played an important role in the next scene. When he saw the papers tumble he wondered to a companion how the actor would recover and began to imagine solutions.

This is exactly what “Page to Stage” hopes to inspire—an appreciation for how a performance is a living organism not just a static recitation of the script.

Similarly, through a number of visits to Rochester City Ballet rehearsals and performances, the scholars learned to appreciate dance in new ways. They followed a production done jointly with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, a production of the classic *Peter and the Wolf* and the production of *The Blood Countess*, a contemporary show about a real Hungarian countess who bathes in the blood of virgins to make herself more youthful.

The scholars seemed to enjoy the theatrical and musical aspects of the performances, says Kylee Fassler, the development director for Rochester City Ballet, but also — from the close-up view of intense rehearsals—came to see also the athleticism of the performers.

It’s worth noting that while Geva’s programs bring in 1,600 city school students annually for free performances, a spokesperson for the Rochester City Ballet says that the Rochester City School District has in recent years been forced to curtail field trips to free performances because of budgetary constraints that have forced cuts to transportation services. It is still possible to conduct mini-programs within individual schools, but the heads of the various arts organizations know that for students to fully appreciate the rhythms of an artistic performance, they must experience it in the appropriate setting, away from the constraints of the classroom—and do so with adequate preparation so that they can better understand how a production comes together, how it should be critically evaluated, and what

it says (or fails to communicate) about the human condition. This is precisely why RocCity SCHOLARS went to such lengths to be sure its scholars had the chance to visit so many of Rochester's cultural and arts institutions.

The scholars made numerous horizon-broadening trips with the guides and Dr. Rosen, each one opening their minds to some new possibility.

They enjoyed a visit to the Memorial Art Gallery for an "Extreme Materials" exhibit, featuring works incorporating insects and animal skeletal remains, but also many ordinary household items—pencils, cereal, plastic bottles, screws, hair, pill boxes and tape. Several toured the George Eastman House (the Kodak founder's mansion, which is linked to the International Museum of Photography on the same premises). After their visit, the scholars were required to answer some analytical questions: What am I curious about? What impressed me most? What do I think was most essential in George Eastman's life; in his success? What message does George Eastman leave with me? What questions do I still have regarding George Eastman?

"In some cases, even though activities were well received by scholars, it was clear that more preparation was needed to maximize the value of the experience."

The scholars also visited the Genesee Country Village and Museum, where they saw for the first time how people lived and worked in upstate New York in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—visiting blacksmith and cooper shops, a finishing school, general store, etc. Some visited the LPGA event at Locust Hill Country Club in Pittsford and had a chance to meet one of the professional women golfers. Some took a cruise on the Sam Patch, a tour boat that

offers a close up look at historical sites along the Genesee River and the Erie Canal. Others took a rock climbing lesson.

In some cases, even though activities were well received by scholars, it was clear that more preparation was needed to maximize the value of the experience. This was true for their attendance at the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra's production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*, where they sat on stage during a rehearsal, in a setting completely foreign to the students.

Even a simple viewing of the 2010 film, *The King's Speech*, would have been enhanced by more preparation. While the pre-movie lunch discussion focused on the background—the rise of Hitler, England's role in WWII, deportation of children to Canada and the United States because of the bombings, and the role of king as leader—one student demonstrated a complete misunderstanding of the historical timeline when he asked if the film's King George VI was the son of Richard III, whom he remembered from Shakespeare's play.

**Socialization:** At RocCity Scholar gatherings, there were regular signs of the social isolation so many disadvantaged city youth live with.

At one outing to Pittsford Plaza, a student snapped a photo of the Cold Stone Creamery shop where the group stopped for ice cream because no one in his family had ever seen an ice cream parlor before. In nice restaurants, students were puzzled, if not embarrassed, to see several forks next to their dinner plates; they had no idea what the cutlery was used for.

When they first came to the program, most scholars had never been shown or encouraged to greet strangers with a firm handshake and a welcoming smile. They could barely look adults in the eye.

They had never thought about making college visits away from Rochester and when the opportunity arose, most scholars had no luggage (just plastic bags for their belongings) or sleeping bags.

Dr. Rosen recalls from her years in New York City how disadvantaged incoming college freshman would arrive on campus with just a suitcase or two—a vivid reminder that not all bright young students have parents who can load up a family car or van with a roomful of furnishings, gadgets and clothes. Many of these disadvantaged students—who she would seek out as Rosen and later RocCity SCHOLARS—arrived without winter jackets or boots, without a full set of bed linens and towels, and certainly without smart phones, laptops, and 32-inch flat screen televisions. College admissions officers often do not understand, Dr. Rosen says, that admitting disadvantaged students is only a first step. They need help to eliminate the barriers to assimilating on campus. Without that help, they are very likely to give up on themselves.

The [Pell Institute](#) reports that low-income first generation college students are nearly four times more likely to leave college after the first year than other students and says they are far less likely to be fully engaged in the college experience and to benefit from the interaction and supports that improve the chances of academic success.

While having lots of “stuff” is not essential to learning, students without the basic accoutrements of modern college life are immediately seen as different. They may find themselves isolated from their peers, or they may

“...in their relationships with the scholars, they repeatedly reinforced their hope that the students would define and achieve their own goals and dreams, that they should never lose sight of who they are and where they have been.”

isolate themselves to avoid embarrassment. This isolation erodes and weakens the college experience, stifles the formation of relationships that can become the basis of lifelong social networks and chips away at the student's sense of self and self-confidence. No wonder so many disadvantaged students—even high achieving students—leave college without a degree and “settle” for much less than they are capable of. That's why RocCity SCHOLARS, unlike other programs that assist disadvantaged students, made sure its students would have the essential tools needed to adjust to the college experience. Scholar guides showed the young scholars how to shop for clothes—how to mix and match to maximize the return on the dollar, but also how to dress for formal and semi-formal occasions. The scholars all received cameras for their personal use, and laptops when they entered college. During their high school years, they received a bus pass, a dictionary and thesaurus, SAT vocabulary book, schedule book/daily reminder, a portfolio, even thank-you notes and stamps.

But while the RocCity vision included providing the scholars with all the essentials, it was not having things for the sake of having things. As noted above, the RocCity SCHOLARS methodology was heavily dependent on relationships. The intention was to assist young people who for whatever reasons lacked critical social experiences to acquire some important life lessons and enter college prepared—socially, intellectually and materially—to succeed.

The cultural activities, the quiet conversations with scholar guides, the shopping trips, the campus visits, the group dinners were all in service of that objective. This is a challenging objective because it can appear as if a group of affluent, mainly white, mainly suburban mentors are trying to offer their way of life as the ideal—to a group of teenagers who are mostly minority, live in low-income homes and neighborhoods and often (but decidedly not always) come from families with at least one absent parent.



But Dr. Rosen and the scholar guides had no such goal in mind. Rather, in their relationships with the scholars, they repeatedly reinforced their hope that the students would define and achieve their own goals and dreams, that they should never lose sight of who they are and where they have been. But they also emphasized that to reach those goals the scholars would have to know how to navigate that “other world”—the one they could only enter with a productive college experience and where they would need to speak the language of success (not only in words, but in their dress, their mannerisms, their formative cultural and social experiences).

The idea was to give these students the basic tools they would need to thrive at the college level.

The program, however, was not one-way. The guides shared their experiences, but also came to better appreciate the world the scholars live in.

This excerpt from an email written by one of the guides gives a pretty good feel for just how complicated even simple tasks can be for families in poverty: “When I took (student) home no one was there. He had no key as he had given it to his sister because she left hers at school. He thought his Mom may have walked to one of the local stores so we wandered around the neighborhood looking for her. He could not call her because her phone had been turned off due to an unpaid bill. He couldn’t use his phone as that also was almost out of minutes. He used my phone to call his grandmother who told him to wait at the next door neighbor’s house. I took him there and he was able to get in.”

Moses Robinson, an experienced Rochester police officer who worked for years as the school resource officer inside East High School, explains it this way: “When you’re dealing with at-risk kids, you’re dealing with emotional trust issues, academic issues, family issues, self-esteem issues. It’s a

struggle for them. They struggle with what does the future look like. They're living in the moment. To get them to project a view of themselves in college is huge. Everybody says they want to go to college, but they need to be able to have a view of themselves actually doing it."

That view of themselves grows naturally when children grow up in an environment that is secure, where they are expected to achieve and go to college, where they have regular opportunities to engage in activities that show them the world beyond their streets—athletics, music lessons and performances, family vacations, summer jobs, etc.

Conventional wisdom has it that children fail in huge numbers in the Rochester City Schools (and other high-poverty urban school systems) because the teachers are incompetent, administrators fail to keep good order, parents fail to impose discipline and structure in their children's lives and take little interest in them.

In fact, it's "not an instructional problem, but a socialization problem," says Rob Brown, a lawyer and former Rochester City Schools Commissioner, the parent of city school graduates and a RocCity SCHOLARS board member.

It's true, he says, that "the family is the most important institution in our culture for socializing children to the middle class values they need to be successful. This is at least as important as the provision of nutrition and shelter. Enculturation like that which the family provides is critical to educational success. Effective instruction cannot occur without it no matter how good the instruction. The family is a very efficient and cost effective provider of enculturation."

But what happens when families—after generations of urban poverty—do not have the resources or experiences to provide that "enculturation?"

It becomes more difficult and much more expensive to fill the holes in a student's experience with other means—programs like RocCity SCHOLARS.

But, Mr. Brown says, “even if it's expensive, the society has a responsibility to try to provide for cultural assimilation because of the systematic destruction of minority families wrought by various policies, practices and programs of the past and present. Most middle class people in our society do not accept this responsibility, so it is not possible to generate the funding to solve the problem institutionally. It is easier to fictionalize the issue into concepts like ‘failing schools’ and ‘failing teachers’ so as to place the blame elsewhere and reduce the cost.”

That was the core business of RocCity SCHOLARS. “Lynn Rosen's efforts to help with the enculturation process for demonstrably bright city students by the use of volunteers is a recognition of this condition and a good attempt at a solution,” Mr. Brown says.

**College Selection:** RocCity SCHOLARS employed a rigorous and methodical approach to assisting scholars in their college search. A detailed chart outlining the timeline and steps taken can be seen in *Appendix i* at the end of this document. Scholar guides and Dr. Rosen helped the scholars identify a range of colleges that could meet their needs and challenge them. The guides accompanied scholars on multiple campus visits and once the scholars had settled on a school, they helped walk them through the financial aid application process.

**The Freshman Year:** As stated earlier, RCS continues to support scholars through the difficult freshman year at college. RCS makes sure each scholar has a supply of new clothes, bed linens and towels, a laptop, personal care products and cash for routine expenses. In addition, Dr. Rosen and some guides are in regular communication with the scholars, offering support and guidance and serving as sounding boards for important decisions.

### 3. Outcomes

#### a. Obstacles encountered

**Funding:** As reported above, the cost of supporting a RocCity Scholar over four years could be tens of thousands of dollars. And while there would be economies of scale in a larger program, the cost is too high for a small group of volunteers. The board concluded that without an endowment or an institutional home, the program would in effect be making a four-year promise to future students with no guarantee it would have the resources to keep its commitments.

Without an endowment or institutional base, the program would have to rely on support from funders who typically write program grants for no more than two years. This approach negates much of the knowledge of affecting behavior modification. It simply takes more than two years to know anything about a new program's effect as a change agent.

In addition, in the years between the end of the Rosen program and the start of the RocCity program significant new costs for insurance were added to the expenses of any organization dealing directly with youth. In the 1990s, no one thought twice about adult volunteers spending time with students outside a school setting, but today volunteers must be carefully screened and organizations must have insurance against false claims of sexual abuse. The insurance costs were substantial.

**Transportation:** In Rochester, one of the more serious impediments to engaging disadvantaged students in the wider community is the absence

“It was soon apparent that RocCity SCHOLARS would need, in addition to its loyal cohort of volunteers, an organizational structure and a paid staff.”

of 24/7 effective public transportation. Even when buses are running, it can take students up to two hours to get from their homes to a play or concert or an event at an area (suburban) college. RocCity SCHOLARS programming was highly dependent on the availability of volunteer drivers.

**Volunteers:** While the RocCity SCHOLARS program was fortunate to have dozens of accomplished scholar guides willing to spend many hours with students over a period of years, it is clear there is a need for a pipeline to recruit and deliver more volunteer scholar guides if the program is to grow at all—even to a cadre of 10 or 12 scholars. In addition, it is important to recruit younger guides and minority guides. Given the transportation obstacles in Rochester, guides must be willing and able to drive scholars to and from their homes, sometimes late at night.

**The school district:** While RocCity SCHOLARS tried to work in tandem with the City School District, it is clear that the school system is so overwhelmed with efforts to improve attendance, manage disruptions, and to assist students in meeting the minimal requirements needed for graduation that it cannot be counted on to direct added resources to support a small number of very gifted students who are well on their way to graduating with honors and attending college.

School district and East High administrators were supportive of the RocCity SCHOLARS in 2010. Indeed then-superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard committed \$7,500 to support its efforts. Shortly, the Rochester-based John F. Wegman and Finebloom Family Foundations made similar commitments.

In New York City, Dr. Rosen found very supportive partners in the two midtown high schools from which Rosen Scholars were recruited. The Superintendent of Manhattan Schools as well as the high school principals loved the idea and set up special accounts, using the school's tax exempt status, to receive and distribute

contributions to the program—freeing Dr. Rosen and the board of the accounting duties.

“It may have been easier in New York City,” says Brad Rosen, who served as the lawyer for the RocCity program, “because the school district is so large that it’s quite possible no one outside the building administration ever knew of the existence of the Rosen Scholars. Principals had the authority and the autonomy to support the program without any interference from above.”

The much smaller Rochester district didn’t allow schools the same level of fiscal independence and district-wide policies and practices created obstacles for the success of RCS.

In Rochester, Dr. Rosen had to manage the finances, create a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization that could receive contributions, as well as coordinate the tutoring sessions, arrange activities for scholars and scholar guides, establish connections with various arts and cultural organizations, and arrange college visits, group dinners and other events. It was soon apparent that RocCity SCHOLARS would need, in addition to its loyal cohort of volunteers, an organizational structure and a paid staff.

As noted earlier, in the original group of four scholars—referred by teachers from the pool of freshmen with a minimum 3.5 unweighted GPA—two were immediately dropped because of very low reading scores. It became clear that the school’s grading system was not a reliable indicator of academic potential. Indeed, during that year, on at least one occasion, a school counselor did not immediately recognize one of his own students when he was pointed out in the hall—a scholar who was qualified for Advanced Placement classes. It may simply be that counselors are often overwhelmed by the numbers of students whose academic programs they must advise. The football coach, when first asked about the scholar who played on his team, said that there were no scholar-athletes on the East team. The coach was pleasantly surprised and turned out to be very supportive of his player and the RCS program. Indeed, one of the ripple effects of the RCS presence in the school was that teachers, coaches and counselors came to see a potential they had not discovered in some of their students.

But it seemed that the school did not have the capacity to reliably identify outstanding students who might be a good fit for RocCity SCHOLARS. In addition, the school either could not or would not actively push the Educational Testing Service for permission to offer some AP classes by Skype when East HS had too few students to justify formation of a class.

Because of the difficulty identifying RCS candidates, the board and school administrators hoped to start a feeder program, known as Pathways, to begin in September 2012. Rising sophomores or older students with at least a 3.5 GPA and who were eligible for AP classes could enter the Pathways program. As such they would receive tutoring and some exposure to the arts. If they made substantial academic progress, they could move into the RCS program. Similarly, scholars who struggled academically could step back to the Pathways track for temporary support and to work their way back to the program.

It was agreed that the Pathways program would take up to 30 qualified students. Ten of the most outstanding students among the qualifying 30 were to be selected as RocCity SCHOLARS. The problems of financial support that confronted the RocCity program and finally caused its demise took hold before any students were identified as possibly qualifying for Pathways and RocCity. However, there was strong and valid indication that significantly fewer than 30 students would be identified as meeting the programs' criteria.

The RocCity SCHOLARS program had grown too large to be run out of Dr. Rosen's apartment. The school had promised office space and some counseling and support staff. The office space and equipment was provided, but critical staff needs went unmet, even though the new superintendent, Bolgen Vargas, had expressed his support for the RCS effort. There was no counseling staff provided and while a support staff person was assigned to RCS, her other duties were so numerous that she had little time to coordinate the RCS efforts in the school.

RocCity SCHOLARS applied for and received a \$50,000 grant from the Rochester-based Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation; the funds were to pay for the services of two part-time staff for one year.

With funding available through the federal No Child Left Behind Act, the school district had paid tutoring costs to allow RocCity SCHOLARS to access the Sylvan Learning Center in Pittsford for sessions with tutors who prepared weekly to assist students with an individualized program tailored to their particular academic needs.

But in the late summer of 2012, news stories reported that Rochester schools were not getting much bang for the federal bucks spent on tutoring services for students in need of help. Tutoring companies were not delivering as promised; student scores were not improving; costs were too high; insufficient numbers of students had access to the tutoring services.

The school district, already aware of the shortcoming, restructured its tutoring services, moving programs back into school buildings, using district employees as tutors where possible, and imposing tougher guidelines on tutoring companies.

In this context, the District informed RocCity SCHOLARS that it would offer SAT prep services at East High School. While RCS used existing funds on hand to continue the Sylvan tutoring for Darius and Liza, the district's tutoring decision may have been the straw that broke the camel's back.

Engaging scholars in activities outside their school and neighborhood is central to the RocCity SCHOLARS approach of opening doors and eyes for disadvantaged students. So, too, is a personalized program of academic support designed to maximize the individual student's ability and to increase chances for success at the college level. Once it was clear that the City School District could not financially support the work of the RocCity SCHOLARS (or could not find in its budget a few thousand dollars annually to assist this small group of very gifted students), the RCS board decided it could not continue the program beyond its commitment to Darius and Liza.

Subsequently, the board returned to the Farash Foundation the grant money it had been awarded for staff salaries.

## **b. What was learned**



Based on the two full years of experience with RocCity SCHOLARS, the board believes the model can be very effective at providing the wide range of experiences and supports young scholars need to succeed in rigorous academic settings. The RCS program has clearly identified and attempted to meet all the needs more traditional college-prep programs ignore. Coming from a low-income family is not the biggest disadvantage these students face. That is not to say financial resources are not an issue, but even with generous financial aid packages, many of these students fail. Rather, they struggle because they have never had the opportunity for the social and cultural experiences more privileged students take for granted. Furthermore, they live so close to the brink financially, that the smallest setbacks (inevitable, if unpredictable) can force them out of school before they've had a chance to prove their abilities.

Providing these critical supports can make the difference in the lives of disadvantaged students. The question isn't whether the RocCity SCHOLARS program can work, but rather, what is a better way to deliver the experiences and sustain its work?

### **c. The need**

Students in high-poverty urban schools are disadvantaged in ways that are more complicated than having limited financial resources. While there have always been and still are many loving parents of children in city schools, thousands of students live in homes and neighborhoods where they lack the critical supports needed to succeed, not just in school, but in life.

Many of the adults in their lives have little formal education and little experience at regular full-time work. They have never tasted the fruits of "the American

“Even students with promising academic potential are trapped, without access to the tools they need to identify colleges that might fit their needs and interests, and without critical assistance in identifying the financial resources that would make college truly accessible to them.”

Dream” and do not have the experience to pass along higher expectations to their children. The cycle perpetuates itself. Even students with promising academic potential are trapped, without access to the tools they need to identify colleges that might fit their needs and interests, and without critical assistance in identifying the financial resources that would make college truly accessible to them. Furthermore, many disadvantaged city students who reach college feel uncomfortable or out of place when they are surrounded by more affluent students with a larger portfolio of life experiences. These students leave college at an alarmingly high rate.

Affluent and middle class students come to campus with a support team behind them (parents, employers, family friends, upper classmen they know from their high school days, etc.) They are not necessarily wealthy, but they know they will be able to weather minor, but inevitable, financial setbacks. Heavily disadvantaged students do not have those supports, and even small setbacks can be fatal to their college careers.

Disadvantaged urban students arrive on campus as refugees arrive in a new country, completely unaware of its customs and practices and without any of the tools they need to assimilate. RocCity SCHOLARS are gifted scholars, but they live on the edge with no room for error in their personal choices. Many talented students are accepted at top colleges but never arrive. Once they see the list of materials they should bring to campus— materials they do not have and cannot acquire on their own—they drop out before they start. They have no luggage or furnishings for a dorm room, let alone warm winter clothes and boots, a dress suit for formal occasions, a personal computer or a debit card for late night snacks or a campus concert.

“Disadvantaged urban students arrive on campus as refugees arrive in a new country, completely unaware of its customs and practices and without any of the tools they need to assimilate.”

One scholar, Dr. Rosen recalls, called her, close to tears, during his first week on campus. He had accidentally spilled a cola on the new laptop he had been given by the program. He had no idea what to do. Dr. Rosen sent him to the college IT department to see if it could be repaired and assured him that if not, it would be replaced. He could not have replaced it on his own. Without a support team at RCS, she says, he very likely would have taken the next bus home, leaving school before he ever took a course. “You cannot leave them at the door,” Dr. Rosen says. These students have no back-ups and, without the financial and personal supports they receive from RocCity SCHOLARS, are at risk of a quick exit from college.

An April 2013 report prepared for the Rochester Area Community Foundation by the Rochester Education Foundation ([“Success for Rochester City Students: Making a College Education Attainable,”](#)) found that the vast majority of Rochester City School District graduates who continue their education (59 percent) go on to community college. But the RCSD has not previously tracked the progress of its graduates through college. The report also found that RCSD students receive very little help from school staff in college selection and financial aid planning.

This lack of critical support for low-income and otherwise disadvantaged city students is likely a key reason so many students never start college or leave prematurely. The school system is summarily unprepared to address this other challenge. Its focus and resources are trained on the narrow goals of graduating students on time.

In effect, the Rochester City School District, like other high-poverty urban school systems, practices a form of triage. The focus is on students with the greatest needs—those with multiple learning disabilities, those who are most disruptive, those who require remediation, etc. On one level, this is perfectly understandable. But it is also counterproductive.

This approach presumes that failure can be reversed with a combination of strategies that includes longer school days, higher standards, more attention to the 3R’s, more rote learning and more security guards. It ignores the social and

cultural experiences so critical to learning to navigate the world outside an inner city school and to nurturing the confidence students will need to take on higher education. Again and again, budget constraints lead urban school superintendents to trim the “frills”—things like instrumental music, theatrical productions, field trips, and varsity sports. These reductions further isolate students, denying them opportunities to get outside the bubble they live in and to showcase their talents. Cuts to arts and extra-curricular activities, coupled with too few Advanced Placement offerings, outdated science and technology facilities and limited access to college planning, hasten the exodus of the few remaining middle class families who prefer city living but who will not sacrifice the quality of their children’s education for the sake of it.

To reverse this decades-long failure, urban schools districts (and their city and/or county and state governments) will have to find ways to retain middle class families and attract many more. They will have to offer some of the amenities these families can easily find in suburban school districts. A vital middle class presence in urban schools would be a bridge to that outside world for the most disadvantaged students. With middle class families come the educational opportunities that can help fill the experience gaps holding back needy students.

The family, the neighborhood and the schools are the most efficient delivery system for acquiring these “other skills,” but when those institutions are weak or absent, the larger community must step in. That’s the role RocCity SCHOLARS hoped to play on a small scale.

And while RocCity SCHOLARS, by design, was a small program targeting a handful of very bright students, its presence could stimulate ripple effects. By engaging successful and well-connected adults from across the community, it could begin to champion the role of the greater Rochester area in educating needy city children—not just the brightest, but all of them. Its scholar guide ambassadors and other supporters could remind the larger community that we all have a stake in the success of city students who will become either productive parents, workers and entrepreneurs *or* perpetuate the cycle of urban decline we are all too familiar with.

#### 4. The Future of RocCity SCHOLARS

After a two-year pilot experiment, the board of the RocCity SCHOLARS has concluded that the program model—a collection of interpersonal, academic, social and cultural supports for disadvantaged students—can be highly effective in improving the scholars’ chances for a successful college career.

However, the commitment to each student is multi-layered and expensive—and cannot be sustained by a small cadre of volunteers. Nor, for reasons cited above, should this program be housed in a public school system.

But a revived RocCity SCHOLARS or a successor program will require an institutional home to assure the sustainability of financial resources and a large volunteer corps.

There are two obvious possible institutional homes for such a program, with the possibility of coupling the two:

- *Rochester-area and other New York State colleges or universities and*
- *Rochester-based alumni groups.*

As noted earlier, essentially all colleges, including elite academic schools, are interested in building diverse campus communities. Colleges are eager to recruit students from racial and ethnic minority groups and low-income students. The schools provide substantial financial aid packages to these students, but still they leave college at an alarming rate, not completing degree requirements. These schools, while eager to diversity, (rightly) do not want to ease their rigorous academic requirements to accommodate disadvantaged students.

“The schools provide substantial financial aid packages to these students, but still they leave college at an alarming rate, not completing degree requirements.”

A RocCity SCHOLARS-type program, administered by colleges, could prepare those recruits academically and socially for the demands of the college experience that awaits them. Such a program could be housed in a college admissions office, or some other appropriate department. It would need to recruit and coordinate volunteers scholar guides (could be faculty, undergraduate or graduate students, and alumni) and maintain a small budget for the personal items those incoming students need to live the college life.

It's not a perfect analogy, but this would involve the kind of aggressive recruitment, engagement and preparation of incoming students now reserved for high school athletes. Within the parameters set forth by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, colleges woo gifted athletes, monitor their progress, bring them to campus and encourage coaches to establish the interpersonal relationships with athletes that will help them feel accepted and build their self-confidence.

Could colleges identify one or two academically promising Rochester high school sophomores every year and bring them into the college family, engaging them with the wide range of activities and supports that will dramatically improve their chances of college graduation?

Similarly, might some of the Rochester area's largest and active alumni groups take on the responsibility for mentoring one or two new students each year, with members serving as scholar guides, interacting with scholars in focused ways? Some would read and discuss books. Others would introduce them to the various arts and cultural organizations in Rochester. Others would travel with them on college visits, or take them out of town for a sporting event. Guides would introduce their scholars to fine restaurants and help them shop for the clothes that would help them function in the "other world" they will experience during their college years. Others would drive them to tutoring sessions and use the before- and after- time for conversation and relationship-building.

Using alumni groups in this way—building on their long-standing recruitment efforts—would forge closer relationships between schools and alums. Schools would assist alumni volunteers in preparing for their roles as scholar guides and, by giving alumni a direct role in nurturing future students (and future alums), deepen their commitment and loyalty to their alma mater.

### III. An Imperative

The RCS board believes these kinds of institutional parents could save the essence of this program. It goes without saying that this would be a great gift to the future scholars who would benefit from the supports they receive.

But even a small niche program could serve as a model for the kind of community engagement that is needed to reverse the catastrophic failure of city schools. Every scholar guide; every city school teacher, administrator or counselor who works with the scholars; and every future scholar becomes an evangelist for the outreach needed to reverse the failure.

Very few students will qualify as top scholars, but every student can benefit from widespread recognition that urban school children need the support of the community beyond the walls of their schools or the boundaries of their neighborhoods and the city line. RCS has demonstrated what's possible when the larger community—not just the school district or the city, but the greater Rochester community—takes responsibility for the education of the most disadvantaged of our children.

Surely there are ways to make this happen. Surely, the continued failure to do so is untenable—and unthinkable.

***This report was written by Mark Hare, a retired journalist and now a freelance writer based in Rochester, N.Y.***

***For more information regarding RocCity Scholars, contact Dr. Lynn Rosen at [lyrosen@rochester.rr.com](mailto:lyrosen@rochester.rr.com)***



**RocCity SCHOLARS Program**  
**College Prep, Search, Selection and Application Curriculum**

**Our Goal:** To guide RocCity SCHOLARS through a series of experiences designed to enable them to identify choices, apply, gain admission and enroll into their school of choice.

Time Table	Activities	Outcomes
Sophomore	Take PSAT and review with school counselor and/or guide	Students will interpret the test score scale, their strengths, and their performance within national and state standing.
	Visit exploratory colleges, including both large and small institutions, which also include some of students' academic and extracurricular interests	Scholars will complete college assessment forms to be able to compare differences in types of institutions and locations and begin to define their preferences.
Rising Junior (summer)	Complete personal interest inventory	Students will begin to define their needs (majors, size, locations, competitiveness, extra-curricular offerings) in a college choice
	Search of Internet for identification of multiple college choices	Students will create an extended list (10-12) of potential college choices using at least one search engine (i.e. College Board) to identify schools that meet their academic, extracurricular and personal interests.
	Participate in an introductory discussion of financial aid programs and college costs	Students will identify the various forms of financial aid available through federal, state, and institution-specific sources as well as how to assess the full cost of college attendance.
	Research on the Web each individual institution on list, requesting materials from the schools	Students will rank order, and potentially narrow, their extended list based on those that best match their interests and needs.

Junior	Repeat PSAT in October and review with counselor and/or guide	Students will be able to use test scores, along with high school grades, to evaluate individual strengths/ weakness of competitiveness for preferred college choices
	Identify possible topics for college application personal essays	By January, student will write first draft on at least two possible topics for college application essays.
	Begin to create portfolio of achievements	Students will develop a list of accomplishments, documented by awards, news articles, resume
	Identify 3 people of influence to write letters of recommendation to support college applications	By April, students will have asked at least two teachers and one additional influencer to write college letters of recommendation, explaining to them why they were selected,
	Complete a Financial Aid Estimator	Students will have a preliminary estimate of what they may qualify for in federal and state aid, plus scholarship opportunities, compare it to their college choice and assess cost of attendance.
	Visit as many as five colleges on extended list, based on proximity and priority, one of which will be an on-campus overnight experience	Students will begin to narrow list of college choices based on likes, dislikes, and competitiveness.
	Prepare and conduct mock-interview with Scholar Guide	Students will be prepared to express their goals, how their college choice will meet their goals, what the student has to offer the college, and will be prepared to ask questions of their interviewer.
	Schedule at least one exploratory interview with college admissions or alumni representative	Students will have more in-depth information about a top college choice and how competitive they may be for admission to that college.
	Register and sit for Spring SAT or ACT exam	Students will have results of at least one college entrance exam and be able to evaluate strengths/ weaknesses and competitiveness for college choices
Rising Senior (summer)	Identify and create a list of independent scholarship opportunities	Students will complete and submit applications for all independent scholarship opportunities for which they may qualify.
	Finalize college list	Review individual needs, preferences, academic performance and create list of 5-10 colleges to which student will apply. College list will include at least one safe, one highly likely, and one "reach" institution.
	Interview with any early decision school choice	Students will gain insight into their chances of admission to an early decision college choice
	Complete personal essays/statements	By August, students will finalize two personal essay options for college applications
Senior	Sit for fall SAT and/or ACT exams	Students will take at least one fall college entrance exam and evaluate competitiveness based on new scores.
	Review college choice list	By November 1 <sup>st</sup> , students will complete and submit all materials required for early decision consideration, if a first-choice college has been chosen

	Complete applications for admission	By January 1 <sup>st</sup> (or earlier based on college deadlines), students will complete and submit all college application materials for admission consideration
	Apply for financial assistance	By February 1 <sup>st</sup> , students will file FAFSA, TAP and any additional forms required to qualify for all possible financial assistance from college choices
	Follow up visits and/or final and overnight visits to compare schools still being considered	By the end of April, students will complete all college visits necessary to make final college choice.
	Pay Deposit	By May 1 <sup>st</sup> , students will make college choice and pay deposit or get a fee-waiver.
	Respond to institution's financial aid offer	By May 1 <sup>st</sup> , students will respond (accept or decline) to institution's financial aid award notice
	Complete Direct Stafford Loan process	If appropriate, students will complete the Direct Stafford Loan entrance counseling interview and complete the master promissory note at <a href="http://www.studentloans.gov">www.studentloans.gov</a>

## RocCity SCHOLARS Program

### Program Intent

The RocCity SCHOLARS will experience a wide variety of experiences that are intended to provide Scholars with opportunities that will: develop disciplined inquiry, curiosity, evidence based reasoning, analytical thinking, an appreciation of the need to listen to and attempt to understand those of differing or opposing views.

### The Process

In order to achieve the Program Intent, the Scholars will be in contact with their Scholar Guides at least once a week and meet with them at least every two weeks. The process is developmental, and is accomplished through a series of experiences that reflect the Scholars goals, and current needs and interests.

The Scholar, in concert with his or her Scholar Guide, is an active participant in the selection of their individualized Program experiences.

### Program Activities

The following activities will be made available to the Scholars.

Grade	Scholarship	Social Skills	Analytical Thinking
9 (summer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tutoring will be made available as needed and SAT test taking strategies will be introduced</li> <li>At least two (2) books will be read and discussed with Scholar Guides and /or other Scholars. Book lists provided will be based upon lists distributed to students at leading Schools throughout the country. Written critiques will be encouraged.</li> <li>Vocabulary building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scholars will be provided with opportunities to participate in swimming and biking. If the Scholar has no experience with these sports, instruction will be provided in order to enhance the Scholar's social self assurance</li> <li>Scholars will attend at least one local sporting event</li> <li>Scholars will dine out with Scholar Guides at least three (3) times during the summer</li> <li>Scholars will take at least one trip outside of Rochester to attend sporting, theatrical or Art event</li> <li>Scholars will visit a local park for a walk or picnic with Scholar Guides at least twice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scholars will be introduced to working artists in their studios and will visit local Cultural organizations and attend local arts events.</li> <li>These events will be followed by discussion and some writing to develop Scholars critical thinking skills.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>during the summer.</li> <li>Assistance in finding summer employment will be provided as needed.</li> </ul>	
<p>All of the activities initiated in the Summer Session will be continued with frequency adjusted as needed and specific experiences altered to accommodate weather and availability. However, the aspects of development of Academic, Social, and Analytical Thinking will be incorporated selectively within the experiences. SAT tutoring will increase during 10<sup>th</sup> grade and part of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Throughout the program individual Scholars' needs will be addressed, such as clothing and any referral needs.</p>			
10		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction to college consideration – the college selection process will be introduced. A checklist will be developed which reflects the Scholars goals, talents and tastes.</li> <li>At least three types of colleges will be visited with Scholar Guides.</li> </ul>	
11		<p>College Application – The Scholar will be assisted through the process of college application to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of Scholars interests and talents and College's requirements and programs</li> <li>Assistance in development of college application</li> <li>Preparation for interview</li> <li>Visits to colleges chosen by the Scholar</li> <li>Review of financial aid offering</li> </ul>	
12		<p>College consideration will progress to consideration of college matriculation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assistance in course selection for first semester registration</li> <li>Assistance in roommate selection, if applicable</li> <li>Assistance furnishing living quarters, if applicable</li> <li>Assistance in identifying a local mentor, if applicable</li> </ul>	
Freshman Year of College		<p>Program personnel will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist the Scholar with moving to and settling in residence as needed</li> <li>Keep in contact with the Scholar on a regular basis and visit on occasion</li> <li>Provide assistance with home visits</li> </ul>	