

BASIC Fund Evaluation

Final Report

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Presented by:



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Executive Summary

Overview of Evaluation

- *Launch Date:* May 2006.
- *Length of Study:* One year.
- *Research Question:* Are students better off as a result of BASIC Fund support?
- *Four Components:* Results for all components of the research are presented in this report.
 1. Standardized Test Score Analysis
 2. High School Graduation Rates
 3. Review of Research Literature on Elementary Age Predictors of High School Graduation
 4. Surveys of Renewal and Attrition Parents

Standardized Test Score Analysis

- *Overall Conclusion Based on First Year Test Score Findings*

As measured by performance on standardized tests in elementary school, students are better off as a result of BASIC Fund support. Academic performance tends to improve (up to 10 percentiles) over one year, and the more years of support students receive, the better they perform.

- *Large Sample for Drawing Conclusions:* 1,202 students.
 - ✓ Response Rate: 54% of schools, representing 60% of students.
- *Measures:* National percentile ranks in reading, language, and math on Iowa Test of Basic Skills.
 - ✓ Percentiles Are Not Grades Like As or Fs: Percentiles between 25% and 75% are average.
- *Three Key Findings Contribute to Overall Conclusion*
 1. BASIC Fund students score 18 to 26 percentiles lower than other private school students.

Conclusion: BASIC Fund students attend schools that can challenge them and can help them grow academically.

2. Over one year, every statistically significant percentile change—representing more than half of the change scores examined—was positive).

Grade	Reading	Language	Math	<i>Conclusion: BASIC Fund students do better over one year in reading, language, and math.</i>
2-3	—	9.6*	5.8*	
3-4	3.5*	—	2.9*	
4-5	—	2.5*	—	
5-6	—	—	—	
6-7	6.3*	3.3*	4.0*	

3. Every statistically significant correlation between years of BASIC Fund support and percentiles is positive.

Grade	Reading	Language	Math	Conclusion:
3	—	—	—	<i>The more years of BASIC Fund support an elementary student receives, the better the student performs.</i>
4	—	—	—	
5	—	0.14**	0.10†	
6	0.11*	0.13*	—	
7	—	—	—	
8	0.13†	0.13†	—	

High School Graduation Rates

- *Methods:* Among 224 former BASIC Fund students from the eighth grade class of 2003, we determined the number who are on track to graduate, using telephone calls, email, and postal mail; peer networking; contacting former elementary schools; contacting private and public high schools; accessing public records; and administering an on-line survey.
- *Progress Since Board Meeting:* In April we reported that among the 79 students (35% of the class) we had contacted, 100% were on track to graduate. Since then, we have contacted an additional 102 students (81% of the class), with almost no change in the graduation rate.
- *Three Key Findings*
 1. Among former BASIC Fund students we reached, **99%** graduated or are on track to graduate. We found only one student who has dropped out without graduating.
 2. Even if we made the extremely conservative assumption that **none** of the unreachable students graduated, the overall graduation rate of former BASIC Fund students would still be substantially **higher** (80%) than the public school graduation rates of San Francisco (73%) and Oakland (46%). These differences are statistically significant at $p < .01$ and $p < .001$, respectively. A more reasonable assumption is that the unreachable students are graduating at rates comparable to the public schools.

	Graduation Rate
<i>BASIC Fund Eighth Grade Class of 2003</i>	
Actual graduation rate (excluding unreachable students)	99%
Range of reasonable estimates (including unreachable students)	89-94%
Most conservative estimate (including unreachable students)	80%
<i>San Francisco Unified School District</i>	73%
<i>Oakland Unified School District</i>	46%

3. A majority of BASIC Fund students are Hispanic (47%) or black (23%), yet the BASIC Fund graduation rate is **much higher** than the rates for Hispanics and blacks in public schools, which range from 23% in Oakland to 49% in San Francisco.

Review of Literature

- *Elementary Predictors of High School Graduation*
 - ✓ Predictors of *Not Graduating*: Number of failed courses; number of failed grade levels; misbehavior at school; family stress (such as divorce, marriage, illness, adults joining or leaving household, moving); number of siblings; number of schools attended.
 - ✓ Predictors of *Graduating*: Parent education level; parent socio-economic status; parent expectations for child's current school performance; parent aspirations for child's future schooling; parent feeling of responsibility for child's school performance; positive parent socialization practices (including reading with child, helping with homework, and providing access to extra-curricular learning environments and summer activities).

Parent Survey Highlights

- *224 Renewal Families*
 - ✓ Predictors of *Not Graduating*
 1. Family Stress: A majority (58%) of BASIC Fund families have experienced at least one major stressor in the past year, and 12% of families experienced two to four stressors. The most common stressors (each experienced by 12 to 16% of families) are illness or death in the family; job loss; divorce or separation; and moving.
 2. Low Parent Education: 4% neither graduated high school nor earned GED. 16% have a GED. 19% have no schooling beyond high school. 18% graduated 4-year college.
 3. Child Risks: 45% of students have two or more siblings. 29% attended two or more elementary schools before private school. 24% have had a behavior problem at school. 7% repeated a grade. 2% failed a subject (without repeating a grade).
 - ✓ Predictors of *Graduating*
 1. More Access to Extracurricular Activities: Now that children are in private school, 43% of children go to extra classes and activities during the school year, significantly more than when they were in public school (20%).
 2. Aspirations for Future Schooling: 43% of parents expect their children to go to private high school, but 86% of parents believe cost of tuition will be a barrier. 29% of parents see two or more barriers to sending their children to private high school.
- *71 Attrition Families*
 - ✓ Most Common Reasons for *Not Renewing*: Inability to afford tuition even with BASIC Fund help (38% of Attrition Families); moving (23%); child not liking the private school (18%); parent not liking the private school (11%).
 - ✓ Reasons Cited by *Less than 10%* of Families: No longer qualifying for BASIC Fund assistance; public schools providing services for special needs; receiving tuition assistance directly from a private school; private school was too challenging; discipline problems; and difficulty with BASIC Fund paperwork.
 - ✓ More At Risk: Attrition families reported significantly more stressful events in the past year than Renewal families.

Overview of Evaluation

In May 2006, The BASIC Fund and See Change Evaluation launched a year-long evaluation of The BASIC Fund. The overarching research question was, “Are students better off as a result of receiving BASIC Fund support?”

This evaluation had four components, each intended to answer one aspect of this question:

1. *Standardized Test Scores:* To assess short- and medium-term effects of BASIC Fund support on elementary students’ school performance, we collected and analyzed the standardized test scores of elementary students currently supported by The BASIC Fund.
2. *High School Graduation Rates:* To assess long-term effects of BASIC Fund support after elementary school, we assessed the high school graduation rates of a cohort of students formerly supported by The BASIC Fund.
3. *Review of Literature:* We reviewed research literature to determine current rates of graduation in the nation, state, and San Francisco Bay area, as well as factors influencing high school graduation rates.
4. *Surveys of Parents:* We surveyed parents whose children receive BASIC Fund support, to compare parental involvement in private schools with their previous involvement in public schools, and to assess likelihood of sending students to private high school after BASIC Fund support ends. We also surveyed parents who have chosen not to renew their children’s scholarships, to examine their reasons for withdrawal from the program.

The remainder of this report reviews in detail the findings of this evaluation study.

The BASIC Fund in Context

The BASIC Fund provides partial scholarships for low-income students to attend private or parochial school in grades K-8. Parents apply for a scholarship based on financial need, and if accepted, the BASIC Fund guarantees support throughout a child’s elementary education. Scholarships cover only a portion of the private school tuition, requiring that the parent also make a contribution, but the scholarships likely make private schooling affordable for families who would not otherwise be able to afford it. Similar programs exist in other major cities, for example, New York and Philadelphia. In these other cities, long waiting lists exist for the scholarships. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the BASIC Fund is able to support all the students who apply.

The goal of the BASIC Fund is to increase the educational opportunities available to low-income students. It is expected that the opportunity to attend a private or parochial school will support and extend a student’s academic performance, perhaps because these schools are often smaller, with more individual attention per student. Many private and parochial schools also have high expectations for parent involvement in a child’s education, a factor that is often associated with strong academic

performance. Whatever the mechanism, the BASIC Fund expects that the opportunity to attend a private or parochial school in grades K-8 will provide a strong foundation for future academic success in high school and beyond.

This evaluation was designed to test these assumptions. Through an exploration of students' standardized test scores, we examined whether or not students' academic performance improves over time once they are attending the private schools. By collecting data on high school graduation rates for the current year's twelfth-grade class of students who formerly participated in the BASIC Fund, we examined the BASIC Fund's long-term effect on students' performance. In addition, we conducted a literature review on factors influencing high school graduation rates, and structured a parent survey that examined the presence or absence of these factors in the families of BASIC Fund students. Finally, we conducted a survey with families who had left the BASIC Fund after received at least one year of support, to examine their reasons for leaving the program.

Without the benefit of random assignment, or a systematically-structured comparison group of students (for example, a matched group of students in public schools), the findings of this evaluation must be interpreted as correlational, rather than causal. In other words, there may be factors that define the group of students and families who choose to accept BASIC Fund support that would lead to their academic success, independent of this support. For example, parents who apply for the BASIC Fund for their child may already be very involved in their children's education. A recent U.S. Department of Education study comparing student performance in private versus public schools found impressive statistically significant differences between student scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), with private schools, on average, scoring higher.¹ However, when individual characteristics of children were controlled for, most of these differences evaporated. In other words, there are students who do well on the tests in public schools, just as there are in private schools, and students in both settings who also do poorly. Rather than compare performance on the basis of school type, it is more informative to compare performance based on student characteristics that may influence performance, no matter what the educational setting. The most informative study would analyze performance by examining how student characteristics may interact with school type, especially over time. For example, do low-income students of color tend to do better or worse in public versus private schools?

In designing our methodology, we sought ways to move beyond a blanket, cross-sectional comparison of school type, and test for a more direct effect of BASIC Fund support on the particular students and families involved, especially over time.

¹ Braun, H., Jenkins, F., and Grigg, W. (2006). *Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling* (NCES 2006-461). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Standardized Test Score Findings

Data Collection Methods: In June 2006 we sent a letter to BASIC Fund-supported private schools requesting all standardized scores on file for the 4,070 students supported by The BASIC Fund during the 2005-2006 school year. BASIC Fund application materials already include a request for parental consent to release scores, so no schools objected to releasing students' scores. BASIC Fund staff followed up by telephone with principals of schools to insure a complete response.

Initial Analysis Plan: We had hoped simply to compare students' private school scores to their scores from their last year in public schools, but this has turned out not to be feasible for two reasons. First, far fewer private schools than we anticipated have students' public scores on file. More important, we learned that in California, public and private schools use different standardized tests, and these tests are not comparable. California public schools use the CAT/9 test, which is not available to private schools. The private schools use several different tests, the most common of which are the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Stanford Achievement Test.

Revised Analysis Plan: Because we could not compare students' performance on the CAT/9 test administered in public schools to other tests administered in private school, we conducted a two-part analysis. First, we compared BASIC Fund students' scores to the scores for the entire San Francisco Archdiocese, which uses the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Second, for students who have several years of test scores in private school, we conducted a longitudinal analysis of whether their scores are improving over time.

Response Rates: We excluded from the evaluation nine schools (with 123 students supported by The BASIC Fund) that do not administer standardized tests. We also excluded students in kindergarten and first grade, because many schools (including the entire San Francisco Archdiocese and the Diocese of Oakland) do not administer standardized tests until second grade.

We received scores from 104 of the 191 schools that had students in second grade or higher who were supported by The BASIC Fund during the 2005-2006 school year (a school response rate of 54%). We collected standardized test scores for 1,202 of the 2,010 BASIC Fund students at these schools in the 2005-2006 school year (a student response rate of 60%).

Table 1 (below) shows the distribution of test types we encountered. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is the most common test, followed by the Stanford Achievement Test. Our analyses focus on the Iowa tests in grades 2 through 7, because there are enough scores to draw conclusions.

Table 1. Distribution of Test Types

Test Type	Grade Level in Elementary School					
	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Iowa</i>	371	435	442	426	442	342
<i>Stanford</i>	291	235	180	92	41	30
<i>Terra Nova</i>	8	5	3	5	3	0
<i>ERB</i>	0	4	4	5	9	5
<i>Other</i>	10	23	32	22	24	13
Total	680	702	661	550	518	372

What Are Percentiles? All of the standardized tests cover three subject areas—Reading, Language, and Math—and convert students’ raw scores in these three subjects to national percentile ranks (abbreviated in this report as *percentiles*). Percentiles range from 1 (the lowest score) to 99 (the highest score).

Percentiles are based on national samples of students who complete the standardized tests. A student’s percentile for a certain subtest indicates how that student compares (or *ranks*) to students in the same grade across the nation who took the same test. For example, if a BASIC Fund student has a percentile of 40 for second grade Reading, this means the student performed as well as or better than 40% of second grade students across the nation on the Reading subtest. If a BASIC Fund student has a percentile of 70 for fifth grade Math, this means the student performed as well as or better than 70% of fifth grade students across the nation on the Math subtest.

*Percentiles Are **Not** Grades Like As or Fs:* When interpreting our results, it is important to keep in mind what national percentile ranks are. Because percentiles range from 1 to 99, it may be tempting to think of them as grades like As, Bs, Cs, Ds, or Fs. However, percentiles are **not** grades, as the following example illustrates.

On a typical test graded on a 100-point system, most students make grades of A (90s), B (80s), or C (70s), and only a small number of students make grades of D (60s) or F (failing, 50s and less). In contrast, percentiles are designed such that 10% of students fall in the 10th percentile, 20% of students fall into the 20th percentile, and so on. As a result, 60% of students score in the 60th percentile *or lower*. Thus, if percentiles were interpreted as grades, it would mean that *by definition*, 60% of students fail or make a D on every standardized test.

According to the publisher of the Iowa test, percentiles between 25% and 75% represent average performance. Education experts do not expect students’ percentiles to change from year to year, *unless something changes in the education they receive*. That is, there is no expectation that students “naturally” progress from low percentiles in second grade to higher percentiles by higher grades. Instead, it takes an entire year’s worth of learning for a student to rank at the same percentile one year later, and it takes even more learning for a student’s percentile to increase.

For the purposes of this analysis, percentiles should be interpreted simply as a metric for comparing a student’s performance to his or her own performance over time, and as a way to compare BASIC Fund students to the average performance of entire schools.

Results—Comparison of Iowa and Stanford Averages: Table 2 (below) compares the average percentiles of BASIC Fund students on the Iowa and Stanford tests. In general, percentiles for the Stanford tests tend to be slightly higher than percentiles for the Iowa tests. Nevertheless, both tests paint a similar picture of BASIC Fund students scoring near the center of the national averages. Younger students (grades 2 through 4) perform at or just below the fiftieth percentile, and older students (grades 5 through 7) perform at or just above the fiftieth percentile. Although this pattern is consistent with students doing better as they spend more years in private schools, a longitudinal analysis is necessary to determine whether students changed over time.

Because of the small numbers of students with scores for the Stanford test, especially in the higher grades, the rest of our analyses focus on scores for the Iowa test.

Table 2. Average National Percentile Ranks for Reading, Language, and Math

Grade Level	Reading		Language		Math	
	Iowa	Stanford	Iowa	Stanford	Iowa	Stanford
2	47	49	42	46	38	46
3	47	49	52	45	47	47
4	50	46	53	47	49	40
5	51	40	53	44	47	47
6	46	44†	51	53†	47	53†
7	51	52†	52	57†	51	53†

†**Note:** Averages for the Stanford Achievement Test in grades 6 and 7 are based on very small sample sizes (28 to 40 students). Sample sizes for all other averages reported in this table range from 88 students (for the Stanford Language subtest, grade 5) to 441 (for the Iowa Language and Reading subtests, grade 6).

Results—Comparison to School Averages: We are just beginning the process of collecting school-wide standardized test averages from the private schools attended by BASIC Fund students. So far, we have a report of scores for the entire San Francisco Archdiocese, which uses the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Table 3 (below) compares the average percentiles for the Archdiocese to the average percentiles of first-year BASIC Fund students who took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Table 3. Comparison of Percentiles for San Francisco Archdiocese and First-Year BASIC Fund Students

Grade Level	Reading		Language		Math	
	Archdiocese	BASIC FUND Students	Archdiocese	BASIC FUND Students	Archdiocese	BASIC FUND Students
2	67	52	60	47	56	37
3	70	49	75	51	68	51
4	74	43	79	46	71	48
5	75	44	78	47	72	47
6	68	41	73	47	68	50
7	74	56	76	51	73	52

Notes: Data in this table are based on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The columns for BASIC Fund Students may include students who did not attend Catholic schools. Scores for eighth-graders are not given because there were fewer than 10 students who started the BASIC Fund in eighth grade.

Table 3 shows that in all three subject areas, and in all six grades, the averages for the San Francisco Archdiocese as a whole are higher than the averages for BASIC Fund students when they start attending private school. Average percentiles for the Archdiocese range from 56 (for second grade Math) to 79 (for fourth grade Language). The differences between the Archdiocese averages and first-year BASIC Fund student averages range from a low of 13 percentiles (for second grade Language) to a high of 33 percentiles (for fourth grade Language).

It should not be surprising that first-year BASIC Fund student averages are lower than the Archdiocese averages. After all, students supported by The BASIC Fund come from low-income backgrounds, and their parents presumably seek help from The BASIC Fund to send their children to schools where they think their children will do better. Indeed, it would be disturbing if the Archdiocese's averages were as low as the first-year students' averages, because this would indicate that the students were already doing as well as was possible for them given their new schools' performance. In other words, this large difference between the Archdiocese's averages and first-year BASIC Fund student averages leads us to conclude that:

The new schools attended by elementary students supported by The BASIC Fund have the potential to challenge them and help them grow academically.

Longitudinal Results—Change Over One Year: If students are better off as a result of receiving BASIC Fund support, our expectation is that their percentiles will improve over time, whether or not their scores ever rise as high as their private schools' averages.

To test this, we computed change scores for students with two or more years of test scores. That is, for a student with data for grade 2 and for grade 3, we subtracted the Reading percentile for grade 2 from the Reading percentile from grade 3. If the result is positive, it indicates that the student's reading improved from grade 2 to grade 3. If the result is negative, it indicates the student's reading got worse over time.

Table 4 (below) summarizes the average change scores for every pair of years between grades 2 and 7.

Table 4. Average Change in Percentiles over One Year

Grade Levels	Reading <i>Iowa</i>	Language <i>Iowa</i>	Math <i>Iowa</i>
2-3	-1.1	9.6*	5.8*
3-4	3.5*	0.9	2.9*
4-5	0.6	2.5*	-1.6
5-6	-1.8	-0.4	-0.1
6-7	6.3*	3.3*	4.0*

Notes: Data in this table are based on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Positive change scores indicate average improvement from one grade to the next, and negative change scores indicate average declines from one grade to the next. An asterisk (*) indicates that an average change score is, statistically speaking, *significantly different from zero* (no change) at $p < .05$ or less. Results that are *statistically significant* are more reliable than other results in the table, which may *seem* large simply by chance, often because the sample size is too small to detect a change.

The results in Table 4 are quite encouraging. The average change scores range from a low of -1.8 (for the Reading subtest between grades 4 and 5), to a high of 9.6 (for the Language subtest between grades 2 and 3). However, what really matters are the average change scores marked by an asterisk (*). These are the changes that, from a statistical point of view, are significantly different from zero (no change).

In Table 4, *every statistically significant change is positive*. In other words, as indicated by the asterisks in Table 4, 8 of 15 of the average changes over one year (53% of the statistical tests) are significant and positive. In contrast, there is no statistically significant evidence that students supported by The BASIC Fund do worse over time in any subject area.

We conclude from Table 4 that:

Elementary students supported by The BASIC Fund tend to do better over one year in reading, language, and math.

The size of the statistically significant improvements corresponds to 3 to 10 percentiles. Evidence for improvement is particularly strong for the Language subtest, for which the change scores on one or both tests is significantly positive for every one-year span except between grades 5 and 6. For all three subject areas, evidence for improvement over time is strongest between grades 2 and 4 and between grades 6 and 7. The only one-year span with no evidence of change is between grades 5 and 6, which in many schools coincides with a students' movement from the "lower grades" to the "upper grades," or from elementary to middle school.

Longitudinal Results—Association Between Years of Support and Scores: Another way to examine whether students benefit from BASIC Fund support is to test whether the number of years of BASIC Fund support is associated with students' scores. In other words, do students who have more years of support have higher percentiles than students with fewer years of support?

To answer this question, we computed *correlation coefficients* between students' percentiles and the number of years that students were supported by The BASIC Fund.

A correlation coefficient measures the strength of the association between two measures. A *positive* correlation indicates that the two variables go up and down together—in other words, a positive correlation means that students with more Funding do *better*, as indicated by higher percentiles. A *negative* correlation indicates that the two variables go in opposite directions—in other words, a negative correlation means that students with more Funding do *worse*. A *zero* correlation (including all correlations that are *not statistically significant*) indicates that two variables are unrelated—that is, students' percentiles may be high or low, regardless of how much support they received.

Table 5 (below) presents the results of this analysis.

Table 5. Correlations Between Years of Support and Percentiles

Grade Levels	Reading	Language	Math
2	0.04	-0.03	-0.06
3	0.00	0.02	0.01
4	0.01	-0.02	0.01
5	0.08	0.14**	0.10†
6	0.11*	0.13*	0.07
7	0.08	0.06	-0.02
8	0.13†	0.13†	0.04

Notes: Data in this table are based on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Asterisks and Daggers: Positive correlations mean students with more years of Funding have better scores. Asterisks and daggers indicate correlations that are statistically significant at ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, and † $p < .10$. The smaller the value of p , the lower the probability that a correlation this size would be observed simply by chance.

Dashes: A dash (—) indicates that a correlation was, statistically speaking, not significantly different from zero. A correlation may be non-significant because years of support were unrelated to test scores, or because the sample size is too small to detect a significant relationship between years of support and test scores.

As with the previous table, what matters in Table 5 are the correlations with asterisks and daggers, which indicate whether the correlations are significantly different from zero.

In Table 5, every statistically significant correlation is positive. There is no statistically significant evidence that students do worse with more years of BASIC Fund support.

We conclude from Table 5 that:

The more years of BASIC Fund support an elementary student receives, the better the student performs.

Evidence for improvement is particularly strong for students in the higher grades (grades 5, 6, and 8), presumably because students in grades 2 through 4 have not yet had as many years to benefit from private schooling. The Language and Reading subtests show the strongest association with years of BASIC Fund support.

Overall Conclusion Based on Test Score Findings: The overall conclusion that we draw from these three findings is that, as measured by performance on standardized tests in elementary school, students are better off as a result of receiving BASIC Fund support. In other words:

Academic performance of BASIC Fund students tends to improve (up to 10 percentiles) over one year, and the more years of support students receive, the better they perform.

Recommendation for Future Data Collection: At the time of this writing, some schools still had not provided their students' test scores, despite their intention to do so. As test scores become available for more students, it will be possible to conduct further analyses of the data, for example, comparing boys and girls, students with two parents versus one parent at home, and students in schools with expensive tuition versus inexpensive tuition.

The BASIC Fund already requires parents to sign a release form, allowing the schools to report the students' grades and test scores to the program. Because schools are busy and may have difficulty complying with the BASIC Fund's request for these scores, it is perhaps more practical to require participating families to provide a copy of their children's test scores to the BASIC Fund each year, as part of the application process. BASIC Fund staff could enter the test score data into the database already created for the purposes of this evaluation, and periodically (for example, once every three years) hire a data analyst to provide a report of student progress.

Graduation Rates of Former BASIC Fund Students

To assess the long-term impact of the BASIC Fund, we determined the graduation rate of 223 former BASIC Fund students who graduated eighth grade in spring 2003. Currently, the BASIC Fund does not keep in contact with students past the 8th grade, or their last year of support. We contacted students at their last known address, and yielded information on only a fraction of the students. To increase our response rate, we used a variety of methods to contact students, including contacting their former elementary schools, current high schools where the student might be enrolled, conducting online searches of websites such as "MySpace" and "Facebook," purchasing online "people finder" services, incentivizing students to respond with a \$10 iTunes giftcard, and contacting friends of the targeted students who might know whether or not they were graduating. In the end, we reached 181 out of the 223 former BASIC Fund students (an 81% response rate).

o Three Key Findings

1. Among former BASIC Fund students we reached (181 students), **99%** (180 students) graduated or are on track to graduate. We found only one student who has dropped out without graduating.
2. Even if we made the extremely conservative assumption that **none** of the unreachable students graduated, the overall graduation rate of former BASIC Fund students would still be substantially **higher** (80%) than the public school graduation rates of San Francisco (73%) and Oakland (46%). These differences are statistically significant at $p < .01$ and $p < .001$, respectively. A more reasonable assumption is that the unreachable students are graduating at rates comparable to the public schools.

Table 6: Graduation Rates Comparison

	Graduation Rate
<i>BASIC Fund Eighth Grade Class of 2003</i>	
Actual graduation rate (excluding unreachable students)	99%
Range ^a of reasonable estimates (including unreachable students)	89-94%
Most conservative estimate (including unreachable students)	80%
<i>San Francisco Unified School District^b</i>	73%
<i>Oakland Unified School District^b</i>	46% ^c

Notes:

a. These estimates are based on the following equation:

$([\text{percent of BASIC FUND students found}] \times [\text{the found BASIC FUND students' actual graduation rate}]) + ([\text{percent of BASIC FUND students NOT found}] \times [\text{estimated graduation rate}])$. The low end of the range is based on the assumption that the unreachable kids graduated at rates comparable to Oakland's: $(.81 \times .99) + (.19 \times .46) = .89 = 89\%$. The high end of the range is based on the assumption that the unreachable kids graduated at rates comparable to San Francisco's: $(.81 \times .99) + (.19 \times .73) = .94 = 94\%$.

b. Public school data are from 2006 because this year's rates have not yet been reported. UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access reports that the trend in California graduation rates has been downward over the past 5 years.

c. Rates for public school districts vary, depending on whether the district, state, or independent researchers calculate them. UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access calculates that Oakland's rate for 2006 was 37%; California's State Department of Education calculates that it was 46%. Both organizations report San Francisco's rate as 73% for 2006.

3. A majority of BASIC Fund students are Hispanic (47%) or black (23%), yet the BASIC Fund graduation rate is **much higher** than the rates for Hispanics and blacks in public schools (which range from 23% in Oakland to 49% in San Francisco²).

Recommendations for Future Data Collection: It was very costly and time-consuming to contact students who had not had any dealings with the BASIC Fund for four years. If the BASIC Fund desires to keep track of high school graduation rates in the future, we recommend that this data is collected as a routine part of families' BASIC Fund experience. The following strategies would facilitate ongoing data collection of this type:

1. Maintain Contact With Families: Make continuing contact with BASIC Fund *after* tuition assistance ends an expectation from the beginning with families. For example:
 - a. Include the expectation of continuing contact on the parent contract or application.
 - b. Set up a system of contacting families annually after assistance ends. This could be as simple as a postcard asking them to check in via a very short and simple web-based survey. The survey would ask where the former BASIC Fund-assisted child is now going to school and how the child is doing, perhaps with enough thank you's and links to helpful information relevant to high school and college to make parents feel that there is a benefit to them for staying in contact with BASIC Fund.

² Swanson, C. B. (2002). *Who Graduates? Who Doesn't? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001*. Urban Institute Education Policy Center.

2. Cultivate Schools for Back-Up Information: Privacy concerns—as well as the practical reality that eighth graders scatter to many different high schools—make it unlikely that *all* graduation information will ever be collected directly from high schools. However, it would still be worthwhile to use schools as a back-up source of information, especially for families who don't stay in direct contact with BASIC Fund. For example:
 - a. Include in BASIC Fund application materials a release that parents would sign, legally giving BASIC Fund the right to collect graduation information on the BASIC Fund-assisted child in the future, which BASIC Fund staff could then use with a high school that refuses to give information about a particular child.
 - b. Cultivate the expectation with BASIC Fund-supported elementary schools that they should annually report to BASIC Fund where BASIC Fund-supported eighth graders are going to high school. In some cases, this may require persuading elementary schools that they should start systematically collecting such information.
 - c. Build closer relationships with Bay Area high schools, private and public, so that administrators who would be looking up and handing out graduation information are not surprised by BASIC Fund requests for information and will help BASIC FUND staff find ways to get needed information despite privacy rules. (For example, this year, Jim's personal relationships with Oakland and San Francisco Catholic superintendents enabled Meghan to get information that had been difficult to get directly from the Catholic high schools. For the San Francisco public schools, Meghan eventually found out that she could make a public records request—but it took a while to find someone who would tell her this.)
3. Develop Relationships with Former Students: Many high school students we contacted did not know that they had previously received BASIC Fund scholarships, so they had no feeling of obligation to respond to our calls and letters. Yet as students progress through high school and approach adulthood, it may make more sense to maintain contact with the former students directly rather than (or in addition to) their parents. For example:
 - a. To remind (or inform) students that they benefited from BASIC Fund scholarships, send a short annual newsletter for "BASIC Fund Alumni" to ninth- through twelfth-graders.
 - b. To get updated information from students, send annual postcards to them (instead of, or in addition to, their parents), asking them to make contact via a web survey. As incentives, offer small, youth-oriented rewards such as iTunes gift certificates, or raffle a larger incentive.
 - c. Offer a one-time monetary reward (for example, \$100) for proof of graduation from high school.

Literature Review: Elementary Age Predictors of High School Graduation

The BASIC Fund provides the opportunity for children to attend the private or parochial school of their choice from Kindergarten through the 8th grade, but it does not provide scholarships or services to youth in high school. A key assumption of the BASIC Fund is that a firm academic foundation in elementary school will increase the likelihood of a student graduating from high school. The very high rate of BASIC Fund students who we determined have gone on to complete high school supports this hypothesis. In addition to school, there are family and individual factors that also affect the likelihood of a student graduating. We conducted a literature review to examine what research has concluded about predictors of high school graduation that appear in the elementary grades.

o *Elementary Predictors of High School Graduation*

✓ Predictors of *Not* Graduating:

We compiled a list from our review of several studies³ of factors that predict a student *not* graduating from high school. This list includes:

- Number of failed courses
- Number of failed grade levels
- Misbehavior at school
- Family stress (such as divorce, marriage, illness, adults joining or leaving household, moving)
- Number of siblings
- Number of schools attended

There seem to be two types of factors associated with high school dropout: family factors, and individual behavior factors. These two sets of factors undoubtedly interact with each other, with family factors being a likely contributor to poor performance and behavior at school. School type (public versus private) does *not* appear to predict whether or not a student will graduate from high school.

³ Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., Horsey, C. S. (1997). *From first grade forward: Early foundations of high school dropout*. *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 70, No. 2. April, pp. 87-107; Barrington, Byron L., *Differentiating Characteristics of High School Graduates, Dropouts, and Nongraduates*, *Journal of Educational Research*, 82:6 (1989:July/Aug.) p.309; Bridgeland, J.M., DiIulio, J.J., Morison, K.B. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Ensminger, M.E., Slusarcick, A.L. (1992). *Paths to high school graduation or dropout: A longitudinal study of a first-grade cohort*. *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 65, No. 2. April, pp. 95-113; Garnier, H.E., Stein, J. A., Jacobs, J.K. (1997). *The process of dropping out of high school: A 19-year perspective*. *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 2. Summer, pp. 395-419; Goldschmidt, P., Wang, J. (1999). *When can schools affect dropout behavior? A longitudinal multilevel analysis*. *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 4. Winter, pp. 715-738.

✓ Predictors of *Graduating*:

These studies also pointed to predictors of a student graduating from high school. This list includes:

- Parent education level
- Parent socio-economic status
- Parent expectations for child's current school performance
- Parent aspirations for child's future schooling
- Parent feeling of responsibility for child's school performance
- Positive parent socialization practices (including reading with child, helping with homework, and providing access to extra-curricular learning environments and summer activities)

While individual behavior factors predicted students' dropping out of high school, only parent characteristics predicted students' graduating from high school. Again, school type did not appear to influence whether or not a student will graduate from high school. Parents play an extremely influential role in their children's academic success.

Parent Survey of Renewing and Attrition Families

The BASIC Fund's only criteria for admission is financial need. The program has not collected detailed information about other characteristics of BASIC Fund families, such as those listed above that may be factors predicting high school graduation. Because the BASIC Fund is concerned with its impact on the student and the family continuing through high school graduation, we sought to determine through a parent survey which of the above predictive factors might be present in current BASIC Fund families. If the BASIC Fund is currently serving families with already high levels of factors predictive of high school graduation, it would be difficult to assert that the BASIC Fund support alone is the factor leading to a student's graduation from high school. However, if the BASIC Fund families do not already have high levels of these predictive factors, there is an argument to be made that the BASIC Fund makes a difference by compensating in some way for their absence.

We also surveyed parents who participated in the BASIC Fund in 2006-2007, and who will *not* be renewing their participation. We sought to understand their reasons for leaving the program.

We received return surveys from 224 current BASIC Fund families who will be renewing their participation next year (renewal families), and 71 surveys from families who will leave the program (attrition families). The following table describes the respondents in more detail.

Table 7: Parent Survey: Description of Respondents

	Renewal Families	Attrition Families
Language of Survey		
English	73%	83%
Spanish	27%	17%
Respondent		
Mother	83%	90%
Father	13%	3%
Grandparent	1%	5%
Other	3%	2%
Sample Size	224	71

We analyzed the parent survey data to determine the presence or absence of factors predictive of high school graduation culled from the literature review.

✓ Predictors of *Not* Graduating

Family Factors

Family Stress: A majority (58%) of BASIC Fund families have experienced at least one major stressor in the past year, and 12% of families experienced two to four stressors. The most common stressors (each experienced by 12 to 16% of families) are illness or death in the family; job loss; divorce or separation; and moving.

Table 8: Family Stressors Experienced in the Past Year^a

	Renewal Families	Attrition Families
Job loss	16%	15%
Illness or death	16%	13%
Family moved	12%	24%
Parents separated or divorced	13%	24%
Another adult left the household	7%	6%
Parent(s) married	4%	6%
Another adult joined the household	4%	7%
Money problems other than job loss	2%	3%
Sibling born	1%	3%
Other stress	1%	1%
School change (including siblings attending different schools)	1%	3%
Housing problems (including fire and homelessness)	1%	1%
<i>Average number of stressors^b (Range: 0-4)</i>	<i>0.8</i>	<i>1.1</i>

Notes:

a. Families were allowed to report as many stressors as applied to their situation.

b. The difference between Attrition and Renewal Families is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Low Parent Education: Four percent of parents neither graduated high school nor earned GED. Sixteen percent have a GED. Nineteen percent have no schooling beyond high school. Eighteen percent graduated from a 4-year college. There were no differences in the education levels of parents in renewal and attrition families.

Table 9: Respondent^a Education Levels

	Percentage
Attended high school ^a	9%
Graduated high school	10%
Attended trade school	3%
Graduated trade school	8%
Attended two-year college	26%
Graduated two-year college	10%
Attended four-year college or university	14%
Graduated four-year college or university	11%
Attended graduate school	2%
Graduated graduate school	7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>

Notes:

- a. There was no difference between the education levels of Renewal and Attrition family respondents.
- b. 4% of respondents neither graduated high school nor earned a GED.

Other family factors we explored included number of siblings, and number of elementary schools previously attended, an indicator of family transiency. Forty-five percent of students have two or more siblings, and 29% attended two or more elementary schools before their current private school.

Individual Behavior Factors

School Behavior: Overall, twenty-four percent of renewing parents reported that their child has had a behavior problem at school in the last year. Overall, 7% of students had repeated a grade, and 2% had failed a subject (without repeating a grade). Interestingly, once students enter the private schools, there is an increased likelihood that the school will report a behavior problem, or that the student will repeat a grade. This trend is most likely because the private schools have more strict enforcement of their behavior policies, and more rigorous academic standards.

Table 10: Comparison of Child Risks in Public and Private School^a

	All Renewal Families	Previous Public School	Current Private School	Statistical Significance
School reported behavior problem	24%	14%	31%	$p < .01$
Student failed a subject (without repeating a grade level)	2%	2%	3%	—
Student repeated a grade level	7%	1%	10%	$p < .05$
<i>Sample size</i>	<i>224</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>119</i>	—

Notes:

a. Half of Renewal families were asked whether any of the following had happened in the past year when the student was in the current public school. The other half of Renewal families were asked about the student's last year in the previous public school.

✓ Predictors of *Graduating*

We also explored the family factors, such as parent aspirations for future schooling, that might predict high school graduation. Less than half (43%) of BASIC Fund parents surveyed reported that they expect their children to go to private high school. A high percentage (86%) of parents believe that the cost of tuition will be a barrier. Twenty-nine percent of parents anticipate two or more barriers to sending their children to private high school.

Table 11: Perceived Obstacles to Sending Child to Private High School

	Percentage
No obstacles	11%
Cost	86%
Don't know how to find good private high school	15%
Transportation is difficult	11%
Child's grades	9%
Good public school is available	8%
<i>Average number of obstacles (Range: 0-5 reasons)</i>	<i>1.3</i>

Note: Families were allowed to report as many obstacles as they perceived. There was not a statistically significant difference in the number of obstacles perceived by Renewal and Attrition families.

Not necessarily a factor predicting high school graduation, but an indicator of student enrichment, BASIC Fund students have more access to extracurricular activities than they did previously. Now that children are in private school, 43% of children go to extra classes and activities during the school year, significantly more than when they were in public school (20%).

Attrition Family Survey

We asked 190 families leaving the BASIC Fund to let us know their reasons. Seventy-one families responded. A breakdown of the response rate is below.

Table 12: Attrition Family Response Rate Details

	Number of Families	Percentage
Surveys Completed	71	37%
Refused to Respond by Phone^a	14	7%
Invalid Contact Information	26	14%
No Response to Mail and Phone	79	42%
Total Surveys Mailed	190	100%

Notes:

a. The family member agreed to do the survey on-line, but did not do so.

The most common reasons families cited for leaving the program included:

- Inability to afford tuition even with BASIC Fund help (38% of Attrition Families)
- Moving (23%);
- Child not liking the private school (18%)
- Parent not liking the private school (11%)

Fewer than 10% of Families reported the following reasons:

- No longer qualifying for BASIC Fund assistance
- Public schools providing services for special needs
- Receiving tuition assistance directly from a private school
- Private school was too challenging
- Discipline problems
- Difficulty with BASIC Fund paperwork

Table 13: Reasons for Attrition

	Percentage
Could not afford, even with BASIC FUND help	38%
Family moved	23%
Parent did not like private school	18%
Child did not like private school	11%
Child needed special services that were available at public school	7%
No longer qualified for BASIC FUND support	7%
School was too hard	4%
Received better tuition assistance directly from school	4%
Discipline issues	3%
BASIC FUND paperwork was too difficult	3%
Chose to homeschool	1%
School moved	1%
<i>Average number of reasons (Range: 0-3 reasons)</i>	<i>1.2</i>

Note: Families were allowed to report as many reasons as applied to their situation.

Based on responses to the stressful-event items on the survey, it is also clear that attrition families reported significantly more stressful events in the past year than renewal families, especially that the family had moved, or a divorce or separation had occurred.

Recommendations for Future Data Collection: We do not recommend that the BASIC Fund invest in further parent surveys at this time, unless a particular need for information presents itself. However, exit interviews conducted by phone with families leaving the BASIC Fund are very useful, and will allow the BASIC Fund to continue to understand the needs of its target population. Rather than a survey, BASIC Fund staff can simply ask families over the phone at the time of exit what their top reason is for leaving, and record the information in the existing database.

Conclusion

As suggested above, it is most likely that the *interaction* between school setting, individual student characteristics, and family characteristics is more predictive of student success in school than any of these factors considered alone. It is likely that BASIC Fund families are more motivated than average public school parents to help their children academically, but it does not follow that family motivation alone, in the absence of parent education and higher socio-economic status, is enough to predict academic success for their children. Survey results show that the BASIC Fund is recruiting families *without* high levels of parent education, or even the highest levels of aspiration for their child's future schooling, and enabling these families to access educational settings where these potential drawbacks may be mitigated by high expectations for student performance, a higher-achieving peer group, and more strict enforcement of academic and behavioral standards. Taken together, the data collected in this evaluation aligns well to suggest that the BASIC Fund is not only providing more educational choice for parents, but is also improving children's academic performance in elementary school, and creating lasting educational effects that carry through to high school graduation.

Recommendations for Further Evaluation

This evaluation was initially conceived as a three-year research effort, to determine the longitudinal effects of BASIC Fund support. In only one year, however, we have been able to obtain sufficient longitudinal data by altering our approach to ask for data on *all* BASIC Fund students for all the years they have participated, instead of taking snapshots of particular grade levels. While additional longitudinal data would be interesting, we do not believe it is essential for the BASIC Fund to continue analyzing this data at this time. We recommend that the program make data collection of student scores and graduation rates a regular part of doing business, and that these data are reviewed and analyzed by an outside contractor every three years.