

dREAM  
BELIEVE  
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# RUTGERS

Future Scholars Program

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## An Innovative, Impactful Pre-College Program *Why Rutgers Future Scholars?*

**S**TUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME AND UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES often attend underfunded elementary and secondary schools. Consequently economically disadvantaged students, regardless of their ambition or academic promise, have limited access to quality institutions of higher learning; lack the essential skills and support to achieve in such institutions; and have a low matriculation and graduation rate. As a result, students from economically underserved communities present untapped potential that not only confines them and their families to a cycle of poverty but stifles the economic growth of the nation.



national summer  
learning association

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***“Every qualified student deserves access to an accountable, high-quality degree or credential that allows them to put their talent to work.”***

**U.S. Department of Education**



The economic and educational disparities that abound in low to middle-income communities lead to further marginalization of vulnerable populations and socio-economic inequity, while also weakening the nation's ability to thrive in a growing global and diverse economy. The importance of a college education is becoming increasingly evident, yet the cost of attending college is prohibitive for many students living in

low to middle-income communities. For the nation to effectively compete in the global economy, institutions of higher learning must invest in delivering affordable quality education to students of diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Rutgers University has a long-standing history of commitment to accessibility and diversity; for example, the student body is highly diverse, many members

are first generation-to-college students, and many receive financial aid. In 2007, the University found itself uniquely positioned to respond to the inaccessibility of higher learning institutions for students living in underserved communities that housed three of Rutgers main campuses. These communities, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Newark, Camden and most recently, Rahway, reflect both the diversity as well as the economic and educational disparity found in similar communities throughout the country. However, despite attempts by Rutgers at recruitment, enrollment of students from those communities were extremely low, supporting the long-held hypothesis that approaching students during their senior year appeared to be an ineffective strategy for students in high risk areas.



**Driven by Rutgers' commitment to accessibility and in response to the emerging data about students from its home districts, Rutgers University President, Richard L. McCormick, announced the inauguration of the Future Scholars Program in 2007.**

**“Finally, and most significantly, I am proud to announce a bold initiative to expand the pipeline of talented students coming to Rutgers from underrepresented communities. Our student body is diverse, but too few young men and women – especially too few young men – enroll at Rutgers from our state’s large cities, including Rutgers’ hometowns of Newark, Camden, Piscataway, and New Brunswick. We know that many students give up on learning as teenagers – or sooner – because they don’t see college in their future. So we will establish the Rutgers Future Scholars Program, a pilot project aimed at reaching minority and low-income students who might otherwise never consider college within their grasp...”**

**Richard L. McCormick,**  
*Rutgers University*  
**President**

**T**he Rutgers Future Scholars (RFS) program is a unique and progressive initiative designed to increase the number of promising low-income, first generation-to-college New Jersey students who complete high school, apply to, and attend post-secondary educational institutions, including Rutgers University. Each year, RFS selects 215 potential “Scholars” in the 7th grade to become a part of this unique pre-college pipeline based on RFS’ principal of “promise” – Scholars ability to invest in themselves for the betterment of their future, families, and communities. These rising 8th graders attend summer programming on their local Rutgers campus to reinforce the value and importance of attending college in the future. During the subsequent summers through their high school graduation, Scholars return to campus for summer programming that includes credit-bearing courses taught by Rutgers faculty, events, and opportunities residential experiences.



The goal of the summer program is to make the college campus a “home away from home” experience for the Scholars and also to boost academic skills in math, science, writing, literature and the arts. The curriculum for each summer experience is designed through a partnership with Rutgers University and the local school districts and are multi-sensory, interdisciplinary, and thematically structured. Credit and non-credit courses and activities are intended to help Scholars connect the classroom to real world issues through theme-based projects. RFS also partners with local businesses in the community to provide Scholars with internships during

the summer to familiarize them with potential employers. Scholars’ summer experiences orient them on what is expected to be successful in high school and accepted into college.

Once the school year begins, Scholars are provided continuous support to assure success and motivation through a RFS Seminar Series that builds on key concepts from the summer. The RFS Seminar Series consists of topics such as *Climbing the Academic Success Ladder*, *College Application Process*, *Financial Planning*, *Career Exploration*, and *Avoiding High School Minefields*. These seminars

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take place 5-7 times a year and give Scholars and opportunity to meet Rutgers faculty and staff, undergraduates, and alumni. The series concludes with a Scholar produced convocation open to parents, sponsors, and administrators.

During the academic year, Scholars are connected with a network of Future Scholars Mentors consisting of an undergraduate student, a local professional, a community member, and a peer leader. This network provides Scholars with academic tutoring, access to personal counseling, and resources to promote career and college readiness. Scholars also have the opportunity to attend cohort meeting with Scholars from the same school district. These meetings provide bonding time for peers to interact and encourage one another.



**Throughout the program, Scholars engage in a five-year interdisciplinary and holistic college preparatory curriculum with the intent of fostering academic growth, social development, and personal enrichment.**

Scholars receive ongoing academic preparation, exposure to college campus and cultural events, attend in-school and after-school tutoring, and are mentored by undergraduate students and staff. In addition, the program offers Scholars an opportunity to explore relevant career paths through internships and exposure to industry professionals. After successfully completing the program, Scholars that qualify and elect to attend Rutgers are awarded a four-year, tuition free education.



## SUMMER SPOTLIGHTS

**T**he National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) and the Rutgers Future Scholars program at Rutgers University campuses of Newark, Camden, and Piscataway and New Brunswick collaborated to assess its summer program quality and delivery at point of service. NSLA is the only national non-profit exclusively focused on closing the achievement gap by increasing access to high-quality summer learning opportunities for all youth. For the past 20 years, NSLA has used researched-based indicators of quality to assist programs in using data to reflect on the state of their program or system, develop and implement a quality improvement plan, and assess and align their efforts with best practices.

NSLA's assessments gauge program quality using the Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment (SLPQA) tool, developed through a formal collaboration between NSLA and the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality to specifically measure the quality of summer learning programs against researched-based standards.

NSLA's assessment of the RFS summer program employed qualitative methods to collect information on the program's quality during the summer of 2016. Based on NSLA's findings, the following four key areas of strengths and best practices were identified to exemplify high-quality summer learning in the field:

### **SAFE ENVIRONMENT.**

*Research suggests that physical and psychological safety needs form the base from which further growth and exploration can proceed. Physical and psychological safety is one of the features of a positive youth development program specified by the National Research Council.*

EMOTIONAL SAFETY occurs when the psychological and emotional safety of the youth are promoted by staff. Youth, especially those living in under-

served communities, experience a lot of inconsistency and uncertainty, which limits their capacity and willingness to take on new challenges and problem solve. The RFS staff provides an emotionally safe environment in which Scholars feel supported and free to take risks, share, and get to know one another. Scholars are treated with mutual respect within an inclusive environment. As a result of meeting the psychological and emotional needs of the Scholars, they become more confident about learning, strive to excel academically, attend the program regularly and are more likely to return each summer.

***"Now I have people who believe in me, and I know I can do it."***

- RFS Scholar, Rising HS Freshman

### **SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT.**

*Research suggests that a warm, positive, and welcoming environment for youth is conducive to learning. Positive development programs for youth are situated in positive relationships between caring adults and youth participants. Key indicators of a supportive environment include instructional practices that facilitate active engagement of youth within*



*activities, staff encouragement of youth within activities, staff engagement of youth, and intentional conflict management that empowers youth.*

A WARM WELCOME creates a positive environment and supportive relationships for youth to be receptive and eager participants in learning. The RFS staff provides a welcoming atmosphere for Scholars to feel comfortable to engage in the program. Upon arrival, Scholars are greeted by all staff with smiles, positive gestures, and eye contact. All staff intentionally spend time interacting with Scholars informally to build strong and trusting relationships. Greeting Scholars, especially by name, gives them a greater sense of ownership and belonging within the program, which increases their buy-in and determination to accomplish program goals.

***"This program will change your life for the better and you will make lifelong friends."***

- RFS Scholar, Rising HS Senior

### **INTERACTION.**

*Research shows that academic success is linked to youth feeling a sense of*

*belonging in a learning community and believing that teachers or adults care about their well-being. A critical research review puts a sense of belonging as one of the mindsets that set the stage for improved learning outcomes by affecting academic perseverance, behaviors, and learning strategies.*

A sense of BELONGING is established when staff facilitate deliberate strategies and structured activities for youth geared towards belonging. The RFS staff provides intentional opportunities for Scholars to get to know one another and sets a positive program culture that supports social and emotional growth. One of the core principles of the RFS program is "Once a Scholar, Always a Scholar" which means that the staff believes in an unconditional commitment to each Scholar. Once a Scholar is admitted into the program, the staff is committed to working with that Scholar despite their life challenges or circumstances. By responding to Scholars' need to belong, the RFS program gives Scholars an opportunity to experience what it means to be a

part of a community and deepens their understanding of the importance of team-building, sharing, and compassion for others.

***"I overall am extremely sad it's coming to an end. I grew up with these people and I feel like Rutgers and my peers in this program are my family. Rutgers is home, for me."***

- RFS Scholar, College Graduate

### **ENGAGEMENT.**

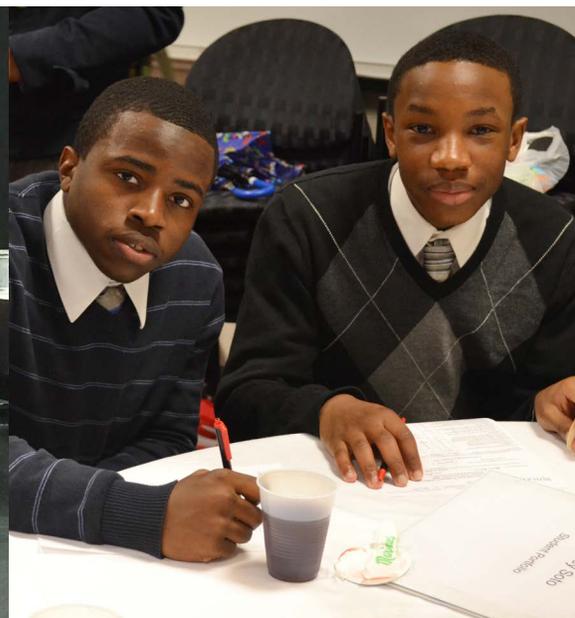
*Research indicates that in order for learning to be retained well and transfer to new settings it must be thoroughly practiced and integrated with existing knowledge schemas. Youth must be actively engaged in the learning process. Engaged learning involves youth learning how to learn, employing learning strategies such as planning and reflection that enable them to transfer and apply learning in different contexts. Learning environments that are supportive, interactive, and engaging promote interest, challenge,*

*and belonging which have been associated with higher levels of youth engagement.*

HIGH ORDER THINKING occurs when youth are supported in actively constructing knowledge as participants in their learning and not passive recipients of knowledge dispensed by adult experts. The RFS staff encourages Scholars to deepen and extend knowledge; make connections between previous knowledge or experiences and new information; and to use their creativity, curiosity, or imagination to use knowledge and skills in new ways. Wondering, supposing, and being open to new ideas are important mental skills in all fields.

***"I thank the Rutgers Future Scholars Program for providing the opportunity for me to achieve my goal of working in the sky...I can rest assured that I have a great education supporting me."***

- RFS Scholar, Aspiring Pilot



## SPOTLIGHT ON OVERALL PROGRAM OUTCOMES

### ACADEMIC IMPACT

Since the program's inception, nearly 1,800 students have entered the RFS pipeline, with the first cohort of RFS alumni graduating from respective post-secondary institutions in May of 2017. The RFS program has successfully reached its goal of increasing the number of promising low-income, first-generation-to-college New Jersey students to complete high school, apply to college, and attend post-secondary educational institutions, including Rutgers.

HS Graduation rate for active RFS Scholars

**98%**

(For all Scholars: 83%)

RFS Alumni currently in college

**85%**

VS

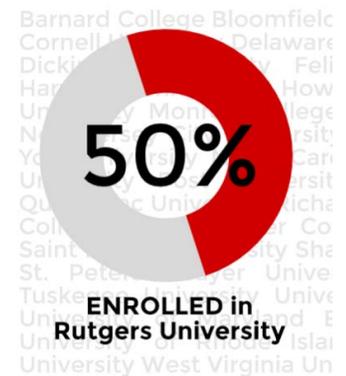
HS Graduation rate across RFS districts

**77%**

HS grads currently in college across RFS districts

**64%**

First year retention rates for RFS alumni, Class of 2018 Scholars is 88% vs. 77% for national first-time-college freshman.



### ECONOMIC IMPACT

Research suggests that increased high school graduation and college progression rates for students can be viewed as a public investment. With a \$4 lifetime return for every \$1 invested in the RFS program, conservative models project a taxpayer return of \$30 million dollars for every cohort of 200 students in the program. As a result, the notable outcomes of the RFS program has inspired programs of prestigious peer institutions such as James Madison University and the University of Michigan.

Annual investment of **\$2,500** per Scholar yields **4:1** return



Every cohort of 200 Scholars saves the state of NJ



**\$30+ million dollars**

"The program instills adrenaline in my body and its heart fulfilling to know that I'm involved in something so uplifting. I know that with the help of this program and some hard work on my behalf, my success is un-limited because I have a tuition free college opportunity!"

- RFS Scholar



# IN CONCLUSION...

**RUTGERS**  
Future Scholars Program

**R**utgers Future Scholars represents an innovative replicable model to inspire peer institutions to partner with school districts to identify, support, prepare, and offer tuition scholarships to promising low-income, first-generation-to-college middle school students. RFS' summer program exemplifies key areas of quality and researched-best practices supported by the National Summer Learning Association at the point of service essential to stemming summer loss and closing the achievement gap that prevents many students from acquiring the skills necessary for acceptance into college. RFS' continual year-round mentoring, tutoring, cohort meetings, and seminar series provides Scholars with the academic, social and emotional support needed to be prepared for the college experience. Last but not least, RFS' four-year tuition free opportunity for Scholars who successfully complete the program, apply, and are accepted into Rutgers University eliminates one of the biggest barriers for youth in low-income communities to even conceive of attending college, cost. For more information, please contact:

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Does your organization need help implementing some of these best practices?

Interested in learning more about NSLA's evaluation process?

Do you want to evaluate your program — but don't know where to start or what tool to use?

[www.summerlearning.org](http://www.summerlearning.org)



**Rutgers Future Scholars** (RFS) can be described simply as a college access program. However, we believe it to be more. We think of it as a movement—a movement towards reimagining how educational institutions can serve their communities. We begin with a declaration; Once a Scholar, Always a Scholar. This is our promise to each young person and their families of our unconditional commitment to their success, in turn, our collective success. We offer hope and opportunity. Our nation has created far too many “zero tolerance” or “no excuses” responses to actions which can be interpreted as undesirable. We believe in supporting young people throughout these critical years during both the hardships and triumphs, and promise to serve as a surefire mainstay, always believing in their genius.