

Summer Academy is Lauded at Foundation's Annual Event

By Ronna Borenstein-Levy

An enthusiastic group of supporters enjoyed fine wines, great food, and wonderful camaraderie as they gathered in March for the 5th annual Wine, Chocolate and Cheese Party sponsored by the B-CC HS Educational Foundation. This year's event focused on the important work of The Summer Academy, a three-week program designed to ease the transition to high school for students struggling at Westland MS.

Participants at the March event also paid tribute to the leadership support of B-CC HS and Westland MS parents Julie Farkas and Seth Goldman, founder of Honest Tea, for their generous donation to The Summer Academy. At a time when funding for the program was falling short, Seth and Julie made a generous multi-year commitment to not only keep the program open, but to revitalize it to better serve the students.

The program's success has been documented in a recent report based on surveys of the students who participated in 2010 and an analysis of their performance during their freshman year.

Approximately 100 Westland students were invited to the 2010 Summer Academy, and 52 accepted. Participants attended four classes daily: English, math, study skills, and a seminar course designed to expose them to a variety of topics and speakers related to daily life at B-CC. In 2010, a day of community service was added to the program, with students choosing from among five different projects.

At the conclusion of the 2010 program, the overwhelming majority of participants reported that they felt "fairly" or "very" comfortable in their preparation for the first day of ninth grade. This confidence carried over to their academic performance: after the first grading period, the percentage of participants eligible for extra-curricular activities (GPA greater than 2.0) was approximately the same as the percentage for the entire ninth grade (86 percent), and 20 percentage points higher than that of the students who had been recommended for the program but declined participation. Similarly, the average GPA for participants was almost 12 percentage points higher than for those who had declined.

The addition of the Community Service Day also had a lasting effect on participants. Many students continued to be involved in community service once the Program ended, and of these students, 70 percent reported that The Summer Academy had sparked their interest in performing community service.

Perhaps most telling, more than 75 percent of the 2010 participants surveyed after completing two grading periods in ninth grade reported that they would recommend the program to a friend entering ninth grade at B-CC.

The Summer Academy is one of the B-CC HS Educational Foundation's signature programs. The Foundation helped B-CC and Westland launch the program in 2002

and has been the primary source of funding ever since. There has been interest in expanding the program to serve more students if the Foundation can raise additional funds.