
**Carson Scholar Alumni
Academic Achievement Study
1996 - 2015**

**Carson Scholar
Alumni**

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INTRODUCTION

The Carson Scholars Fund is a non-profit organization founded in 1994 by Johns Hopkins pediatric neurosurgeon Dr. Benjamin Carson and his wife, Candy Carson. The Fund implements two national initiatives. The **Carson Scholars Initiative** recognizes academic excellence in young students with humanitarian qualities (4th–11th grade). Carson Scholars from urban, suburban and rural areas join together in regional celebrations. They are called upon to think of themselves as community leaders. The **Ben Carson Reading Rooms Project**, is designed to support a love of reading in schools located in predominantly low-income neighborhoods.

This report focuses on the Carson Scholars Initiative, presenting a snapshot of Carson Scholar alumni college enrollment and completion rates, graduate degrees obtained, and areas of study – especially STEM-related degrees. Formative Evaluation Research Associates (FERA), an independent research group based in Ann Arbor, Michigan conducted this study for the Carson Scholars Fund with support from a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant. The remaining sections of this report include: 1) study methods; 2) background; 3) an overview of Carson Scholars 1996-2014, 4) alumni outcomes; and 6) conclusions.

STUDY METHODS

National Student Clearing House has a “StudentTracker” database. Nation-wide StudentTracker includes more than 3,600 colleges and universities (public and private) enrolling 98% of students nationwide. The database serves as a central repository of information about the enrollment status and educational achievements of both current and former postsecondary students. FERA submitted all of Carson Scholar alumni with high school graduation dates from May 1996 to May 2014 (n=3,304) to StudentTracker. A total of 3,304 names of Carson Scholar alumni (1996-2014) were submitted to StudentTracker in August of 2015. Data was available in their database for 2,742 students. It was unavailable for 562 individuals - reasons why include: 1) they opted out from having their college-related data shared with StudentTracker; 2) they are a student at one of the colleges that does not send its data to StudentTracker; or 3) they have never enrolled in a

college.¹ There are no data available from StudentTracker on the breakdown of these reasons.

Study Limitations

Disparities in high school and college graduation rates exist by race/ethnicity and gender. This data was not consistently or easily available and was beyond the scope of the study resources. Any evaluation is shaped by both conceptual and practical limitations. It is also shaped by the questions it explores, the resources available to implement it, the methods used to collect and analyze information, and the data available on which to base findings. For example, the findings presented in this report cannot tell us the extent to which being a Carson Scholar contributed to high school and college graduation rates. It can however, document scholars' college enrollment and completion rates after graduating from high school.

BACKGROUND

The overarching goal of the Carson Scholars Initiative is to cultivate future leaders who are not only intellectually talented but also socially conscious. What makes the Carson Scholars Initiative different from the number of other programs that recognize excellence in scholarship around the country is the *age* of the recipients. The recipients are primarily elementary and middle school students instead of high school seniors or college-aged students, the typical scholarship recipients. In this merit-based program students in 4th–11th grades are eligible to be nominated by their schools to apply to be a Carson Scholar. Any accredited K-12 school in the country is eligible to have a Carson Scholar.

Carson Scholar Award process:

- ◆ Students in grades four through eleven are nominated by their schools to participate in a competitive selection process that requires them to complete an application and write an essay.
- ◆ Any elementary, middle or high school in the U.S.A. can nominate a student to be a Carson Scholar. Scholarship funds and parts of the selection process vary by school.

¹ These 563 students were treated as “missing data.”

- ◆ Each year the winners are chosen by a panel of impartial judges comprised of teachers and educators using a standard set of criteria.

Recognition of current Carson Scholars:

- ◆ Scholars are invited to attend a regional banquet in their honor (families, teachers and school principals are invited too)
- ◆ Scholars receive a \$1,000 scholarship which is invested and grows until they are ready to use it for college, a certificate and Olympic-style medal
- ◆ Scholars receive a large trophy to be displayed at their school with the names of Carson Scholars
- ◆ Scholars are recognized at their school in many different ways

Additional recognition for returning Carson Scholars:

- ◆ Originally, scholars could be awarded additional Carson scholarships in subsequent years. As of 2010, Scholars can only receive a scholarship once. Now they can receive recognition if they have continued to achieve academic success as evidenced by their grades. These Scholars receive a recognition pin to attach to their medal, a certificate, a nameplate to add to their school's trophy, and an invitation to an awards banquet.

Carson Scholar Alumni Hall of Fame:

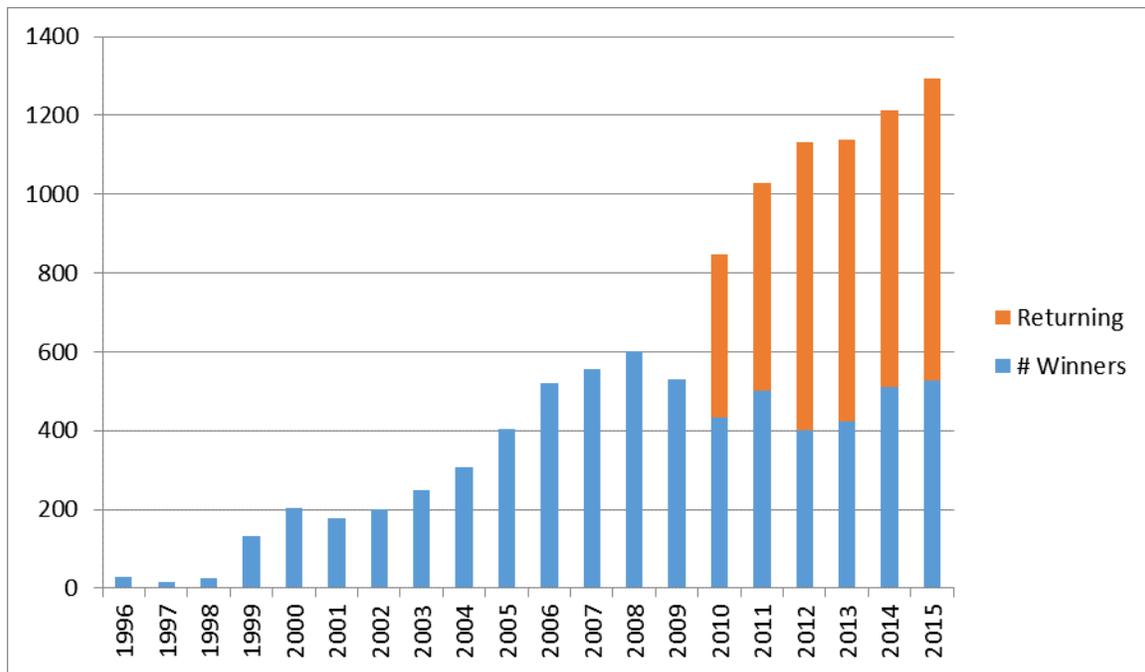
- ◆ New in 2015, alumni under the age of 30 can apply to be included in the Carson Scholar Hall of Fame where their achievements will be highlighted. Twenty individuals will be selected. Winners will be announced in 2016.

CARSON SCHOLARS - 1996-2015

Growth in the number of Scholars (1996 – 2015): In 1996, 25 students were recognized as Carson Scholars. By 2015 more than 500 students became first-time Carson Scholars and over 700 received recognition as “returning” Scholars (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Numbers of Carson Scholar Awards and Returning Scholar Recognition (1996-2015)



- ◆ 1996- 2015 over 6,700 Carson Scholars have been recognized
- ◆ Carson Scholars represent all 50 states and Washington, D.C.
- ◆ \$6.7 million in scholarships have been awarded
- ◆ More than \$3.6 million have been paid out to colleges and universities on behalf of the scholars.
- ◆ Since 2010, the Carson Scholars Fund has given out over 3,800 scholar recognition packages with 2,000+ returning Carson Scholars being recognized for their academic and humanitarian achievements in multiple years. (Scholars can be awarded the scholar recognition package multiple times).
- ◆ 93% of Carson Scholars graduate from high school and attend college
- ◆ Carson Scholars have attended more than 500 colleges and universities

Geographic reach: Co-founders Dr. Ben Carson and Candy Carson’s dream is to have a Carson Scholar in every school in the country. As of 2015, past and present Carson Scholars represent all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Chapters of the Carson

Scholars Initiative have been established in thirteen cities/states to further the initiative's goals through local fundraising activities. Chapters are located in:

- ◆ California – total California Scholars 143
- ◆ Connecticut (New Haven) – total Connecticut Scholars 56
- ◆ Delaware – total Delaware Scholars 241
- ◆ Florida (Lee County and West Palm Beach) – total Florida Scholars 393
- ◆ Georgia (Atlanta) – total Georgia Scholars 347
- ◆ Illinois (Chicago) – total Illinois Scholars 120
- ◆ Indiana (Indianapolis) – total Indiana Scholars 293
- ◆ Maryland (Headquarters) – total Maryland Scholars 3,172
- ◆ Michigan (Battle Creek) – total Michigan Scholars 346
- ◆ Pennsylvania (Greater Philadelphia and Pittsburgh) – total Pennsylvania Scholars 1,033
- ◆ Tennessee (Chattanooga) – total Tennessee Scholars 109
- ◆ Washington D.C. – total D.C. Scholars 107

Figure 2 – Cities with Carson Scholars



When they became Carson Scholars, many students lived in cities such as Baltimore, Battle Creek, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta where high school and graduation rates are much

lower than national rates (see above list of Chapters). This helps provide context for the findings presented in this report. For example, high school graduation rates are only 59% in Atlanta, 70% in Baltimore, 74% in Pittsburgh, and 81% nation-wide.²

ALUMNI OUTCOMES

This section presents key findings regarding the higher education activity of Carson Scholar alumni following their high school years. Overall, out of 2,742 students who have enrolled in college and are in the StudentTracker database:

- ✓ n=1,701 are currently/or have been enrolled in college but have not yet graduated
- ✓ n= 1,041 Graduated with one or more degrees

College Enrollment

Key finding: *93% of Carson Scholars graduate from high school and attend college.*³

Key finding: *While Carson Scholar alumni are selected on the basis of merit criteria, 40% obtain need-based scholarships from other sources. Carson Scholars who attend college received:*

- ◆ Merit – based scholarships 56% (n=1,175)
- ◆ Need - based scholarships 40% (n= 834)
- ◆ Non-academic financial aid 6% (n=130)

Carson Scholars went to:

- ◆ public colleges 79% (n=789)
- ◆ private colleges 53% (n=524)
- ◆ Some attended a private university followed by a public one or vice versa.

Not quite half of Carson Scholar alumni 41% (n= 1,340) have been out of high school for four years or less. This group of students may be enrolled in college, but not yet have graduated from a college program.

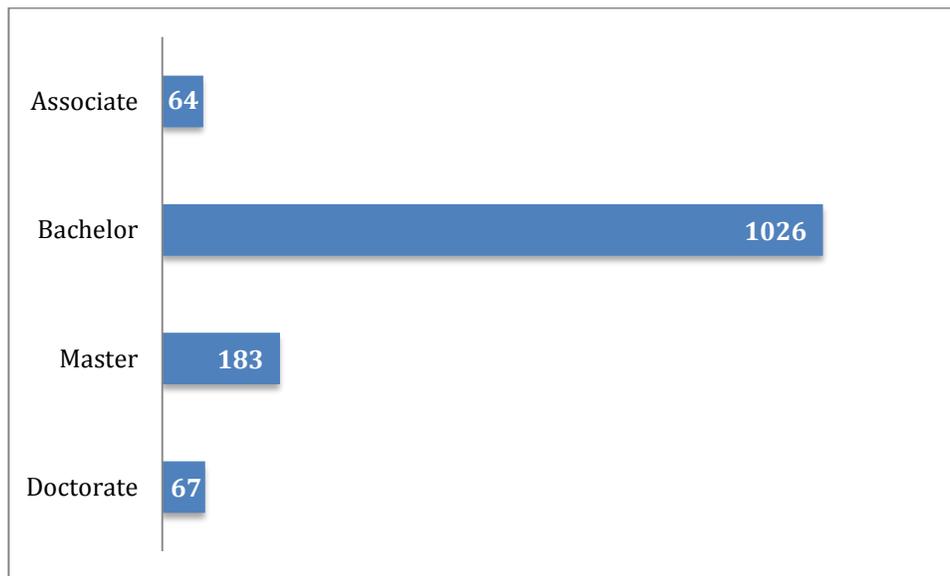
² Graduation statistics are from the Georgia Department of Education: www.gadoe.org, Maryland State Department of Education, <http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/>, Pennsylvania Department of Education: <http://www.education.pa.gov/>, and the National Center for Education Statistics: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coi.asp

³ This figure is based on Carson Scholar Scholarship payout data for 2,084 alumni through 2015.

Degrees Received

Key finding: *Carson Scholar alumni are successful students. Carson Scholar alumni earned 1,026 Bachelor's degrees and 250 graduate degrees (see Figure 2). Some students were awarded more than one degree.*

Figure 3 – Degrees Obtained by Carson Scholar Alumni Who Enrolled in College N=1,285 alumni⁴ (1997-2014)



Graduate Degrees

Key finding. *About one-third of those who graduate from college continue on to complete a Master's or other advanced degree (Ph.D., MD, JD). Carson Scholars were awarded:*

- ◆ 183 Master's degrees (6 students received two Masters)
- ◆ 23 Juris Doctors
- ◆ 31 Doctors of medicine, pharmacy, audiology, dental surgery, dental medicine, physical therapy, chiropractic, and veterinary medicine.
- ◆ 13 Ph.D.'s in applied math, chemistry, history, materials sciences, education,

⁴ Some alumni received more than one degree (5 obtained more than 1 Associates degree and 44 more than one Bachelors).

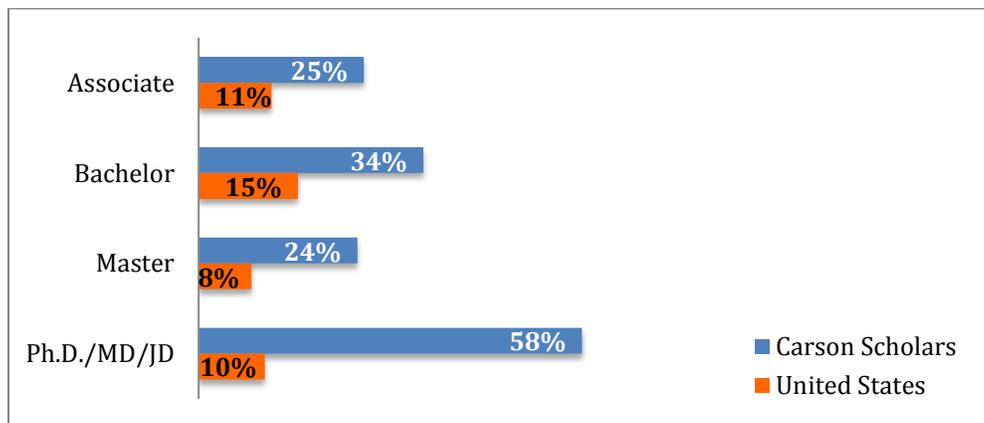
mechanical engineering, civil engineering, physics, organizational leadership, mass communication, and romance languages.

STEM – Related Degrees

Key finding: Carson Scholar alumni earning college level degrees in STEM-related subjects is double or more than national rates (see Figure 3).

While involvement in STEM-related subjects or activities is not a criteria for being selected as a Carson Scholar, alumni are obtaining degrees in STEM-related fields. Examples of STEM-related majors are: Aerospace Engineering, Animal Sciences, Biochemistry, Biology, Chemical Engineering, Chemistry, Civil Engineering, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Environmental Science, Exercise Science, Information Science, Mathematics, Mechanical Engineering, Medical Coding, Molecular Biology, Neuroscience, Nursing, Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Physics.

Figure 4 – Percent of STEM-Related Degrees Obtained by Carson Scholar Alumni as Compared to College Graduates Nationally⁵



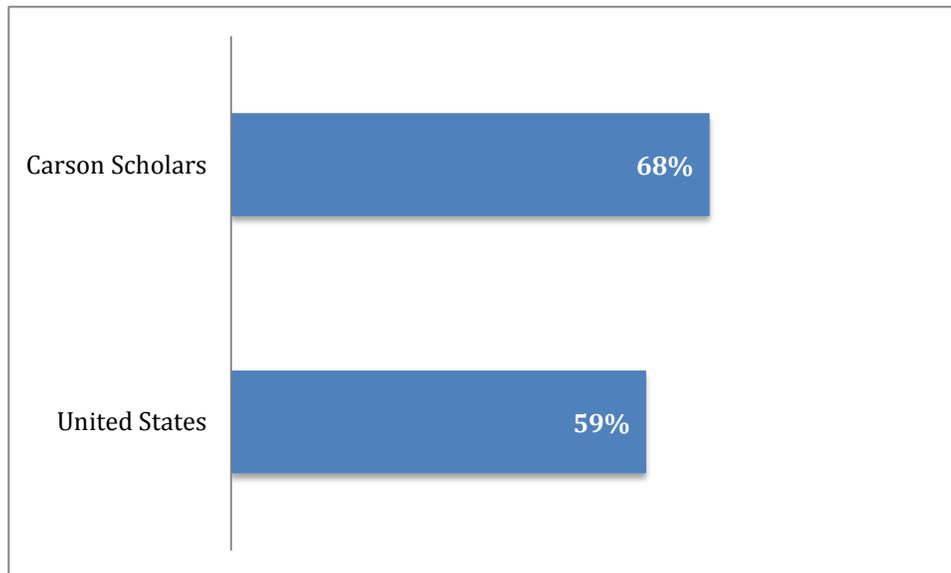
⁵ Note that the U.S. percentage is for 2010 only. Carson Alumni Scholars percentages are cumulative from 1997 to 2014, and may be different for the 2010 academic year. To arrive at the national percentages of STEM degrees we took the number of stem degrees from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_318.45.asp, subtracted nonresidents and then divided by the total number of degrees from the table found at: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72>.

Comparison of College Graduation Rates

Key finding: *Carson Scholar alumni college completion rate is 9% higher than national rates (see Figure 4).*

FERA conducted an analysis of a smaller group of Carson Scholar Alumni to assess graduation rates and to compare these to national rates. We included students who would have completed high school in the spring of 2009 have had adequate time to graduate from college. Overall, of those 997 students, 687 (68%) received a Bachelor degree. The most recent national comparison is for students who completed high school in the spring of 2007. Of these students, 59% received a bachelor's degree by 2013.

**Figure 5 – A Comparison of Carson Scholar Alumni
and National College Graduation Rates ⁶**



⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40> Note that the U.S. percentage is for 2013 only. Carson Alumni Scholars percentages are cumulative from 1997 to 2014, and may be different for the 2013 academic year.

CONCLUSIONS

The Carson Scholars Fund is expanding its reach nation-wide and while not yet there, is moving steadily toward its goal of having a Carson Scholar in every school across the country. Fully 93% of Carson Scholars graduate from high school and attend college. Of those about half are still in college and the rest have received Associates (n=64) or Bachelor's degrees (n=1,026). Alumni receiving a Bachelor's degrees have gone on to achieve advanced degrees (Masters 183 degrees and Ph.D., MD/JD 67 degrees). Interestingly, they are obtaining college degrees in STEM-related fields more than double than their counterparts (other college graduates) nationally. More than two thirds of Carson Scholars (68%) graduate college, higher than the most recent national graduation rate of 59%.