



**Elevation  
Scholars**



# 2022-23 Annual Report



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## MISSION

We invest in high-need, high-achieving students who have demonstrated community impact, helping them to and through the nation's most competitive colleges and universities.

## VISION

To be the premier community organization celebrated for college success among high-achieving, high-need students throughout Central Florida.

## VALUES

- Kindness
- Service
- Leadership
- Discipline

## LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

As we close out our 10th anniversary year celebration, we are energized by our students, our community, and your continued support of our vision.

At Elevation Scholars, we forge deep and lasting connections with our students, guiding them through the rigorous college admissions process, introducing them to diverse career prospects, and providing vital resources and support throughout their college journeys.

Our students are often in the top three percent of their class. However, despite excelling in academics, they face roadblocks that prevent them from pursuing the nation's most competitive colleges and universities.

When students enroll in colleges that are less academically selective than those for which they are academically prepared, the results are lower graduation rates, lower lifetime earnings, less social capital, and higher debt.

We exist to address that inequity.

We believe in the boundless potential of our students to effect profound change in their communities, our nation, and the world. We encourage our students to dream big and collaborate with education and community partners to transform those dreams into reality.

As you read through this report, we hope you are inspired by the world-changers we are blessed to walk alongside on their Elevation Scholars journey.

**Steve Orosz**  
Board Chair

**Scott Lee**  
President



# 2022-23 At a Glance

## PROGRAM SCOPE

- Six partner high schools  
Edgewater | Evans | Colonial | Jones | Oak Ridge | Winter Springs
- 225 served through various programs at our participating high schools
- 18 Scholars currently being coached through college admissions as high school seniors
- 72 Elevation Scholars currently attending college
- 15 college graduates
- 33 alumni

## PROGRAM IMPACT



**100%**

College Graduation Rate



**\$268,108**

Average Support Earned

## OUR STUDENTS\*

**4.75**

Weighted  
GPA

**\$39,132**

Median  
Household Income

**84%**

First-Generation  
College Students

*\*Figures are for Class 10*

We are proud of the caliber of colleges and universities our Scholars earn acceptance to each year. In our most recent class, 94% of our Scholars were accepted into a Top 30 institution as rated by U.S. News & World Reports.



# THE ELEVATION SCHOLARS Journey

What does it mean to be an Elevation Scholar? What's the purpose of the award? Here's a deeper dive into the Elevation Scholars Award process and why we commit five years to walk alongside our students. Because it's not enough to help them get scholarships or gain acceptance. Our goal? To increase their college access and ensure successful completion of a college degree from the nation's most competitive colleges and universities.



## High School Junior

- Apply for the **Elevation Scholars Award** – a five-year commitment valued at \$25,000 for selected rising seniors. Funds are used for college admissions coaching and four years of wraparound support while students are in college.
- Participate in **Interview Day**, where the Scholars team will interview students, their parents, and teachers for acceptance into the program.
- Celebrate acceptance as an Elevation Scholar at our annual **Award Celebration**.

## High School Seniors

- Begin college admissions coaching
- Attend **Horizon Events**, where students are exposed to various career opportunities.
- Scholars announce their schools – **Decision Day**



Scan here for a video playlist highlighting the Elevation Scholars Journey.

## College Students

- College Success Coaches regularly check in with scholars to assist them in navigating their college environment, maximizing their college resources, and persisting. This includes the special touch of sending **dorm kits** for incoming freshmen.
- Receive monthly financial support in a customized package that funds things like airfare to come home for breaks, winter clothes, monthly spending stipend, and other academic needs.
- Referrals to program partners who support students' career connections by providing job shadowing, paid internships, professional mentoring, and other critical career development offerings.





## SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

# Darien

## Colonial High School, Purdue University

Colonial High School graduate Darien is paving a new path for this family as a freshman at Purdue University. Double majoring in Actuarial Science and Applied Statistics with a minor in Management, there's no doubt that Darien excels in the classroom.

In high school, Darien maintained an impressive academic record, earning a 4.0 GPA and a weighted 5.0 GPA. He even shared the 10th rank with another top-performing student, which is a testament to the competitiveness at his school.

But for his Scholars family, what truly sets Darien apart is his remarkable personal attributes.

"Upon meeting Darien, it was evident he was an exceptional young man," shared Elevation College Coach Keycha Cruz Ocasio. "His sweet disposition, tireless work ethic, unwavering commitment to family, and ability to be a true friend to everyone he meets are just a few of his standout qualities. In my recommendation letter, I highlighted his remarkable skill in recognizing when people around him faced difficulties and his willingness to step up

and help. Darien is incredibly aware of his surroundings and possesses a high level of self-awareness, navigating the world with grace and humility."

But Darien's journey was far from easy. He faced various challenges along the way, and it was through his remarkable ability to adapt and his relentless problem-solving skills that he navigated those challenges.

Balancing his demanding work schedule and college preparations was yet another obstacle. While working part-time in customer service during high school, Darien had to manage his time effectively to excel academically, attend Elevation events, and prepare his college applications. It was daunting, but he handled it with remarkable composure and dedication.

Navigating the unfamiliar territory of colleges outside Florida posed another challenge for Darien. Like many of his peers, he didn't have a vast understanding of schools beyond his home state. Finding colleges aligned with his academic goals and social interests required some exploration, which he approached with determination and an open mind.

"Elevation Scholars has impacted my life in many ways," Darien shared. "With the help and support from Elevation, they showed me how much more potential I had. Elevation's many resources and support made the transition easy and allowed me to live out a dream I never thought I would have had."

**SCHOLARS SPEAK:** REFLECTIONS FROM A COLLEGE SCHOLAR

# Christie

Oak Ridge High School,  
Brandeis University

I attended Oak Ridge High School and am now a senior at Brandeis University. I'm majoring in sociology with concentrations in legal studies and education. My college journey has been a whirlwind of emotions - scary and exciting all at once. It's hard to believe that I'm almost out the door!

Throughout this journey, Elevation Scholars has been my rock. It's more than just a program; it's like a second family to me. I've never felt there was a situation I couldn't turn to Elevation for support. This program has allowed me to live the dream I've had since middle school - going to college. They've been there for me through all the twists and turns, offering emotional, academic, and financial support.

Coming from a low-income background and leaving home for college is like entering a dark room. Elevation has been my guiding light, helping me navigate these past few years.

Professionally, I plan to become a teacher, potentially returning to Orlando to teach high school or middle school English or social studies. I love teaching, and I want to explore it further. Eventually, my long-term goal is to become a professor, but there are so many areas I'm interested in, so I'll figure that out over the next few years. I aim to be financially stable, purchase a home, and travel while continuing to live out the opportunities college has presented.



Christie



Edna



## SCHOLARS SPEAK: REFLECTIONS FROM ALUMNI

# Edna Evans High School, Wake Forest University



From the great Evans High School, I made my way to Wake Forest University in North Carolina, thanks to the assistance provided by Elevation. Today, I serve as a legislative staffer in Congress, where my primary role is that of a Legislative Correspondent. In this role, I handle our correspondence program, which involves interacting with constituents and addressing their inquiries, comments, and messages about current policies and programs.

One significant aspect of my role is translating complex legislative matters into straightforward, accessible terms for constituents. I believe in ensuring that everyone understands what's happening in Congress. In addition to this, I manage a policy portfolio, focusing on bills, writing, and collaborating with other offices on sponsorships and ideas.

I encountered the Elevation Scholars program around my sophomore year in high school. I was drawn to their high school programming events and the opportunity to join. Elevation Scholars played a pivotal role in my college preparation, helping with test prep, financial aspects like application fees, and guiding me through the application process. They broadened my horizons and opened my eyes to out-of-state schools, which I wouldn't have considered otherwise. Elevation Scholars extended my opportunities and ensured I didn't limit myself to my immediate surroundings.

As for my future plans, I'm still early in my career on Capitol Hill, and over the next year, I look forward to expanding my knowledge and experience as a legislative staffer. In the next five years, I see myself returning to school for either a law degree or a master's degree in a specialized field of public policy. If I pursue law, I aspire to work in the South, focusing on criminal defense and civil rights law. I genuinely love Washington, D.C., and the DMV area, and I intend to engage in more volunteer work and community service to give back to this vibrant community.

Reflecting on my experiences and the opportunities Elevation Scholars provided, I'm inspired to give back to young Black women in similar situations. I dream of establishing a scholarship fund to support those who aspire to attend their dream schools, especially historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Spelman College has a special place in my heart, and I envision creating a fund for young women who face financial barriers in fulfilling their dreams. If not, I'd like to create a fund for my alma mater to benefit Black students and organizations. I'm also keen on building a network of Black alumni to facilitate giving back to the community that made me who I am.

Elevation Scholars now has 33 alumni. Of those alumni who have entered the workforce, 68% have done so in Central Florida.

# Program Spotlights

## HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMMING



In addition to our awards program, we provide a mix of after-school and in-school programming with the goal of creating a college-going atmosphere throughout our partner high schools. This allows students to gain insight into the college admissions process to decrease the information deficit surrounding the process. Last year, we served over 225 students at Evans, Edgewater, and Jones High Schools. Sessions included resume-building, group coaching, community service, and college application support.

## 2023 HORIZON EVENTS

Every summer, our Scholars have the opportunity to immerse themselves in various professional industries, thanks to our corporate sponsors and community partners. These annual “Horizon Events” are meant to spark curiosity in our Scholars and provide a welcoming, professional environment for them to explore their interests.

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### Career Tracks

liberal arts, business, healthcare, and computer science and engineering

15

### Community Partners



100%

### Scholar Participants





## ANNUAL AWARDS CELEBRATION

During our Annual Awards Celebration, we come together to celebrate students who earned a Scholars Award and spotlight where they are on their journey. Highlights from the event:

- **Class 5 – College Graduates**

Graduates from several notable colleges and universities, including Wake Forest University, Morehouse College, Wesleyan University, and Florida State University.

- **Class 9 – High School Seniors**

First-time acceptances to Georgetown, Purdue University, University of Richmond, Columbia University, Vanderbilt, and MIT. Additionally, this cohort earned more than \$3 million in financial aid and scholarships.

- **Class 10 – High School Juniors**

This year, we welcomed 18 new students as Elevation Scholars!





“It’s not enough to get excited about the mission. That’s just the start. Elevation Scholars is all about excellence and delivering work at the highest level. This is a great example to the Scholars on how to maintain a commitment to something at the highest level. For future volunteers, get ready for some inspiring stories. My involvement with Scholars has been very rewarding and will be a transformative opportunity for anyone interested in volunteering or supporting as a funder.”

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

# Braulio Colón

As a first-generation college graduate, Braulio Colón has a personal connection to the mission of Elevation Scholars. He began volunteering as a funding facilitator, helping to secure thousands of dollars for strategic funding for the organization. He has also served during the interview process for the last four Scholars classes.

“Elevation Scholars is unique because of the intangibles,” Colón shared. “Elevation’s leaders are driven by their unwavering commitment to the students. They are passionate about the work.”

A proud graduate of Evans High School, Braulio is an experienced non-profit executive and education system-change strategist. His over 20 years of leadership experience has focused on Florida state-based programmatic and policy development work at the state agency, university, community-based, and philanthropic levels.

He is co-founder and Executive Director at Florida College Access Network, an independent statewide organization hosted by the University of South Florida that engages communities to improve college access and success for all students.

As a leader in the space of student success and equity in higher education, he recognizes the importance of organizations like Elevation Scholars.

Although Elevation continues to make a transformative impact, Colón acknowledges there is still much work to be done.

“Florida's success hinges on increased state investment in education and need-based financial aid. We have abundant talent and potential, but we burden families with inadequate support. There's much work to be done in our state, and leaders must be well-informed by the data.”

Colón applauds Elevation Scholars for working to build a model that other organizations can look to as a blueprint.

“We've witnessed firsthand the profound, far-reaching impact of Scholars' work, not only on individual students but entire families and communities. This exponential impact transforms entire neighborhoods. This is a unique and powerful experience.”



# Community Partners

## Corporate Partners



## Foundation Partners

Chelsey G. Magruder  
Foundation

Edward E. Haddock  
Family Foundation

Elizabeth Morse  
Genius Foundation

Glenda G. Morgan  
Charitable Foundation



## Funding Partners

BKHM  
Cogent Bank  
Insperity  
JLL Capital Markets

McGriff Insurance  
Merrill Lynch  
NEI  
Propel Insurance

RPF Funding  
Truist  
UBS  
Valley National Bank

## Awards Sponsors

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Ira and Lisa Pinnelas  
Jonathan Claber  
Kyle and Kelsey Smith  
Matt and Sara Hill  
Matt Orosz  
Mitch Schrenk

Randy Ellington  
Rick and Tammy Cardenas  
Russ and Andi Prather  
Scott and Amy Lee  
Steve Orosz  
Tim and Michelle Seneff  
Tommy and Barbara Beck  
Worth Oelschlager

## Education Partners



# Financials

## INCOME

6/30/2023 YTD

Corporate Giving	\$ 384,250
Foundation Grants	\$ 587,202
Events Income	\$ 97,038
Individual Giving	\$ 229,061
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 1,297,551</b>

## EXPENSE

### Scholars

Scholars Staff	\$ 486,915
High School Programs	\$ 5,566
College Scholars	\$ 282,642
High School Scholars	\$ 53,792
Marketing	\$ 42,390
Training, Travel & Consulting	\$ 35,281
Community Engagement Events	\$ 55,426

**Total · Scholars** \$ 962,012

### Non-Program

Administration Staff	\$ 134,598
Accounting & Professional Fees	\$ 62,200
Facility & Facility Misc.	\$ 63,610
Fundraising, Evaluation, and Other	\$ 81,763

**Total · Non-Scholars** \$ 342,171

**Total Expense** \$ 1,304,183

**Net Income** \$ (6,632)

**ELEVATION SCHOLARS**

# Board of Directors

Steve Orosz  
Board Chair

Reverend Mike Aitcheson

Dr. Shani Cunningham

Karl Melo

Paul Morgan

Rod Morss

Andrew Orosz

Dr. Russ Prather

Micki Meyer



**Elevation  
Scholars**

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

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