



is

**REVOLUTIONARY**

Scholars  
**Unlimited**

**Annual Report  
2025**

# Letter from the CEO

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Community Members,

As I reflect on this extraordinary year at Scholars Unlimited, I am reminded of the profound truth that has guided our work for over three decades: Joy is revolutionary. In a world where educational inequities persist and federal budget cuts threaten the very programs our children depend on, we refuse to be led by fear. Instead, we are led by joy—joy in the decisions we make, the relationships we build, and the lives we continue to transform through our work.

This year, that revolutionary joy has been evident in every corner of our programs. When 88% of our after-school scholars report that Scholars Unlimited made them better readers, I see joy in discovery. When 92% share that they feel more confident in themselves, I witness joy in self-realization. When a parent tells us, "My daughter was not reading prior to camp and is leaving with being able to sound out words and successfully read books. Her confidence is through the roof," I experience the revolutionary power of joy in learning.

This year brought unprecedented challenges. Budget cuts threatened more than 70% of our funding, forcing us to make difficult decisions while never compromising our commitment to our scholars and families. Yet even in uncertainty, we discovered that our foundation—built on authentic relationships, culturally responsive programming, and unwavering belief in every child's potential—remains unshakeable.

To our dedicated staff, committed board members, generous supporters, and resilient families: thank you for believing in the revolutionary power of joy. Thank you for standing with us, especially when the odds seemed against us. Together, we have created spaces where children don't just survive but thrive.

**Joy is revolutionary. And we are just getting started.**

With gratitude and hope,



Abenicio Rael  
President & CEO

**"Joy is a freedom. When you continue to give it away you will still have so much more of it." -Maya Angelou**

# 2024-25

## By The Numbers



Scholars served across after-school and summer programs



School sites across metro Denver



School districts partnered with



Years of serving communities



Students served since 1993



Attendance rate for Summer Scholars



Languages spoken in our community



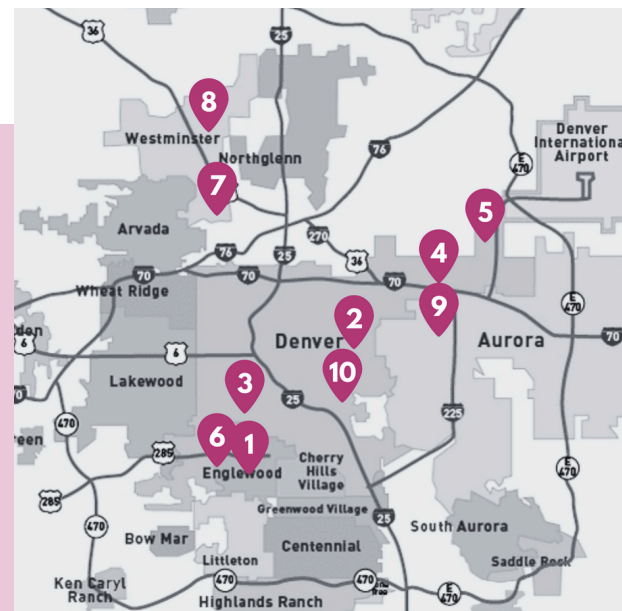
Scholars qualify for free or reduced lunch



Scholars identify as BIPOC

## Program Locations

1. Alice Terry Elementary
2. Ashley Elementary
3. College View Elementary
4. Farrell B. Howell ECE- 8
5. Florida Pitt Waller K-8
6. Fort Logan Northgate
7. Harris Park Elementary
8. Mesa Elementary
9. Park Lane Elementary
10. Place Bridge Academy



# Academic Impact

## After-School Program (427scholars)

- 88% report Scholars After School made them a better reader
- 75% improved reading fluency
- 79% increased vocabulary size
- 90% learned a new skill that helped them in school

## Summer Scholars (308 scholars)

- 54% grew in vocabulary
- 61% improved reading fluency
- 87% enjoyed reading over the summer
- 89% learned a new skill for school



# Social-Emotional Growth

## Building Confidence & Connection

- 92% of Summer Scholars feel more confident in themselves
- 90% of Summer Scholars feel connected to staff and peers
- 92% of After-School scholars made new friends
- 90% worked on making good choices

## Excitement for Learning

- 85% of Summer Scholars are more excited about learning
- 82% of After-School scholars are more excited to learn
- 92% like the activities and projects in their programs



# In Their Own Words

From principals to parents, students to staff, the voices are unanimous: Scholars Unlimited is filling a critical gap in education while rekindling the joy of learning. Here's what the Scholars Unlimited community has to say about rediscovering the excitement of education:



Our educators became educators because we find joy in learning, and we want our kids to find that as well. We are really excited to have this program that can give kids the opportunity to do hands-on, fun things so they are also finding joy in learning.

**-Nadia Madan Morrow, Principal, Place Bridge Academy,**

Scholars Unlimited gave me the support that I needed at that after school gap. I don't know anyone in my field that gets off at three o'clock. Just being able to know that there was somewhere safe for them to go.

**-Annjalique, Parent**

If Scholars Unlimited didn't exist, I wouldn't have this much learning time, and this much confidence and power, and I wouldn't have too much to learn about.

**-Maddie, Student**

We have a lot of kids who express that in their traditional schooling, they often feel overlooked and that they're getting left behind. I like to think of us as a bridge or a continuation of care where we can really support the work that teachers and schools are already doing.

**-Yaquelin Avitia Orozco, Scholars Unlimited Staff**



# Scholars After School

**Where learning becomes joyful and every voice matters**

## **Building Bridges Between School and Home**

Scholars After School transforms the critical hours after the school day ends into a time of discovery, growth, and connection. Operating within the familiar walls of partner schools across metro Denver, our comprehensive program serves **427 scholars across 10 school sites and 4 districts**, creating safe havens where children don't just receive academic support. They find joy in learning. Our approach combines evidence-based literacy intervention with hands-on STEM exploration, social-emotional learning, and enrichment activities that honor the diverse backgrounds of the families we serve.



## **Mental Health Initiative: Healing Through Connection**

Recognizing that academic growth and emotional well-being are inseparable, Scholars After School launched a mental health initiative in partnership with MSU Denver's School of Social Work. Graduate-level social work interns are embedded within programming, providing both individual and group mental health support directly within the trusted environment of after-school sites. This groundbreaking approach addresses Colorado's critical shortage of mental health providers while providing trauma-informed care and social-emotional support as a natural part of the daily experience.



They are able to communicate with me instead of shutting down and staying quiet. They can tell me when something is wrong or when they've done something they weren't supposed to.

**- Family Member**

# Scholars After School

## Voice and Choice: Scholars as Partners

Central to our philosophy is the belief that children are experts on their own experiences. Throughout our programming, scholars exercise voice and choice in their learning journey. From selecting enrichment activities to advocating for program improvements, students shape their own educational experience. Staff document and respond to scholar requests, whether it's organizing recycling projects, choosing movement activities, or suggesting new learning themes. During family celebration events, scholars take the lead in presenting their accomplishments and sharing what they've discovered, demonstrating true ownership of their growth.

This approach builds self-advocacy skills that extend far beyond our program walls, preparing students to navigate educational systems with confidence and purpose.



I appreciate what you guys are doing for the community. I am very fortunate for my child to be able to attend this program.

**- After School Parent**



# Summer Scholars

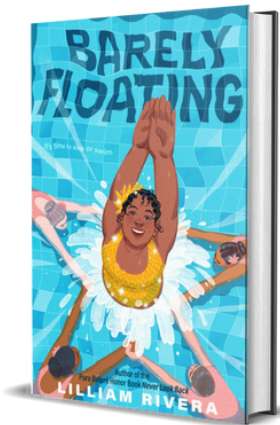
**Six weeks of joyful learning, endless possibilities**

## When Summer Means Growth, Not Loss

While many children experience learning loss during summer months, Summer Scholars creates the opposite effect: 308 scholars across 3 different school districts engaged in intensive, full-day programming that blended academic growth with the pure joy of discovery. With an impressive 80% attendance rate, our six-week summer program proved that when learning is culturally responsive, relationship-centered, and fun, children choose to show up.



## Culturally Responsive Literature: Barely Floating



Understanding that representation matters, Summer Scholars 2025 centered around "Barely Floating" by Lilliam Rivera, a powerful novel featuring Natalia, a proud Latina swimmer navigating body positivity, family expectations, and finding her voice. This intentional book selection reflects our commitment to ensuring BIPOC children see themselves as protagonists in the stories they read.

Recognizing that BIPOC children are represented in less than 24% of all children's books as lead characters, we deliberately choose literature that honors our scholars' experiences. Through Natalia's journey, scholars explored themes of identity development, self-advocacy, and cultural pride, themes that resonated deeply with their own experiences of growing up in multiple cultural contexts. The novel became a launching point for creative writing projects, identity exploration activities, and discussions about resilience and belonging.

# Summer Scholars

## Experiential Learning Through Community Partnerships

Summer Scholars came alive through partnerships that brought learning beyond classroom walls through intentional opportunities for scholars to practice social skills and explore new environments.

### Movement and Wellness with Vive Wellness

We were proud to partner with Vive Wellness, a local, Latina-led organization that brings energy, movement, and culturally responsive programming to our enrichment sessions. Through fun activities and positive adult relationships, scholars developed confidence, joy, and a sense of belonging, outcomes that last well beyond the program day.

### Field Trip Adventures

Field trips connected scholars to experiences and spaces across our community, from the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and the Denver Zoo to Warrior Challenge, swimming adventures, and more. These outings sparked joy and curiosity while providing access to opportunities many scholars might not otherwise experience.



We are so thankful for Summer Scholars!!! This was our third year with Summer Scholars and it's been awesome having the peace of mind that our son has somewhere to go and fun things to do. We love that our son does some learning but also has fun.

**- Summer Scholars Parent**



# Summer Scholars

## Family Engagement: Celebrating Together

Families are partners in every child's success, and we honor the cultural wealth that families bring while creating opportunities for connection.

**Scholars Showcase:** The summer culminated in a "Scholars Showcase" where scholar-led gallery walks. Families were active participants, asking questions, and witnessing their children's confidence in action.

**Multilingual Communication:** All family communications are provided in both English and Spanish, with staff receiving compensation for translation services rather than expecting unpaid labor. This approach ensures language is never a barrier to engagement.

**Cultural Celebration:** Programming incorporates community storytelling and cultural traditions, creating opportunities for families to see their knowledge honored as curriculum rather than overlooked or marginalized.



My daughter was not reading prior to camp and is leaving with being able to sound out words and successfully read books. Her confidence is through the roof and she is so proud of herself. You all did an amazing job and I thank you all!

- **Summer Scholars Parent**





# Summer Gala

## A celebration of joy at Denver Botanic Gardens

Our Summer Gala in June 2025 was a testament to our belief that joy is a powerful force for transformation. Inspired by *Barely Floating* by Lilliam Rivera, a book our older scholars read over the summer, the evening explored what it means to create joyful, affirming spaces where young people can grow, lead, and be themselves.

**Guests joined us at the Denver Botanic Gardens for a vibrant night of connection, storytelling, and celebration—all grounded in our belief that joy isn't just a feeling, but a powerful force for change.**



Throughout the evening, one truth resonated: the revolution starts with joy. In a world that often tells children from marginalized communities what they cannot achieve, we create spaces that celebrate what they can become. The gala embodied this philosophy, bringing together a community united in the belief that joy is not frivolous. It's fundamental to transformation.

Thank you to everyone who made the night so special. The revolution starts with joy. And joy starts with you!



# Scholars Unlimited Donors 2024-25

*We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the individuals, families, foundations, and organizations who invested in joy and transformation through their generous support.*

## **\$25,000+**

Helen M. McLoraine Summer Scholars Endowment Fund  
Sisters of St. Francis - Sacred Heart Charitable Fund

## **\$10,000 - \$24,999**

May Chou  
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Topfer Family Foundation

## **\$5,000 - \$9,999**

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Gene Watkins  
Louis Wolfe  
Michael Wilson  
Rhonda Zieg

# Education Partners



# Sponsors





# Scholars Unlimited Team

## Staff

**Yaquelin Avitia Orozco**

HR Coordinator

**Shannon Fisher**

Multi Site Manager

**Patrick Glover**

Accounting Manager

**Michael Kagan**

Data Coordinator

**Jasmine Martinez**

Program Support Coordinator

**Jennie Merrigan**

Vice President of Impact

**Gabriel Palmquist**

Multi Site Manager

**Robbin Proctor**

Staff Accountant

**Abenicio Rael**

President & CEO

**Shentel Rodriguez**

HR Manager

**Amy Silverberg**

Deputy Director of Programs and Operations

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**Alexandra Lansing**, Vice Chair

**Ramiro Jimenez**, Treasurer

**Martha Bahamon**

**Will Chan**

**Rose Martinez**

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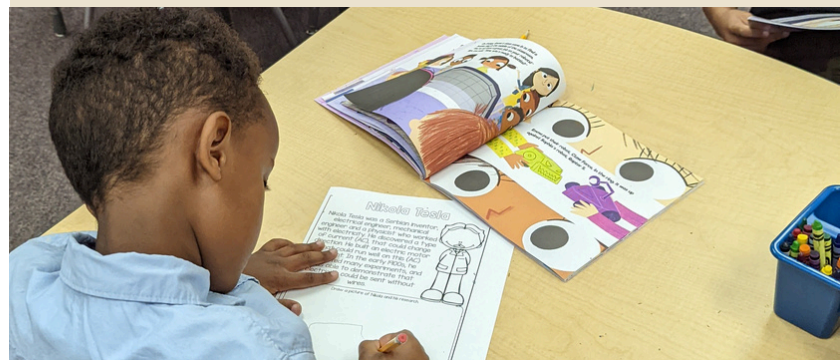
**Melissa Rosas**

**Daniel Sandoval**

**Jessica Smith**

**Dr. Franita Ware**

**Michelle White**



## Mission

Our mission is to foster academic, social, and emotional growth for children living in metro Denver communities.

## Vision

Our organizational vision is an unwavering commitment to empower students to achieve academic and personal success.

Our vision and mission are on the foundation of our values in the belief in every child's potential, the belief in cultivating life-long learners, and the belief in the power of every child, family, and community.

## Values

Community, Equity, & Joy



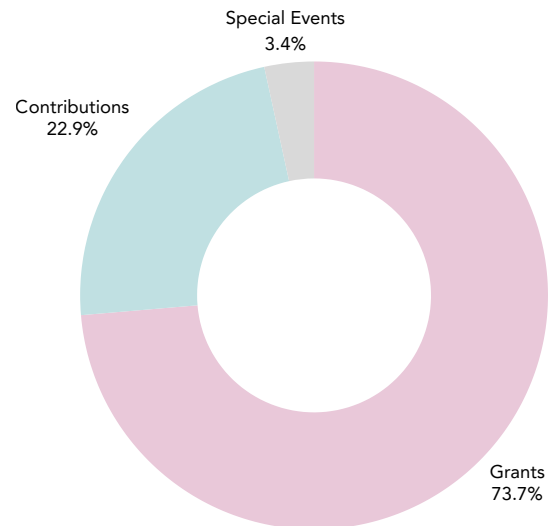


# 2024-25 Financials

## (August 1, 2024-July 31, 2025)

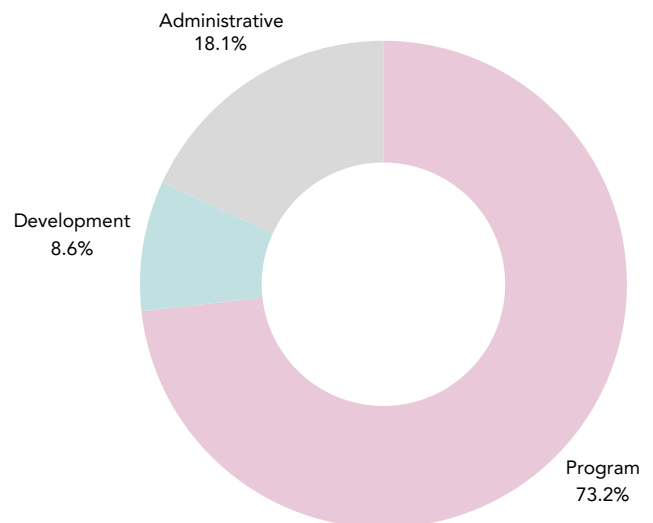
### Revenue

Grants	\$1,387,993
Contributions and Support	\$432,085
Special Events	\$64,432
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,884,510</b>



### Expenses

Program	\$1,627,962
Development	\$192,020
Administrative	\$403,090
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,223,072</b>



In 2024–25, we received \$1.88 million in revenue, including more than \$1.3 million from grants and over \$430,000 from contributions and community support. We invested \$1.63 million directly into programs, ensuring our after-school and summer opportunities stayed strong, joyful, and impactful.

As expected, we closed the year with a deficit, a reflection of ongoing post-COVID realities and shifts in district funding, but used our \$1.5 million in beginning assets to maintain uninterrupted programming. With your continued support, we expect to return to balanced operations in 2025–26. Together, we are proving that joy is revolutionary.



# Scholars Unlimited

## Support



Fuel our mission  
with a gift amount  
that brings you joy

## Connect



Follow  
Scholars Unlimited  
on social media

## Partner



Become a  
Community Partner  
or Sponsor