



ALLOFUS

LINK UNLIMITED SCHOLARS /// IMPACT REPORT 2021-2022

**Building tomorrow's
Black leaders** *today.*



**LINK
Unlimited
Scholars**

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“Our future will be shaped by how we prepare *young people* today. These youth are our future leaders, and if we want them to be successful and ensure a better world for ourselves and upcoming generations, we have to invest in their preparation.”

Dr. Toinette Gunn
President & CEO

Dear LINK Family & Friends,

We are so pleased to open this year's report together—our first official joint message since Dr. Gunn became our President & CEO. It's a new season for the whole team—we're growing to better serve LINK Scholars so they can become all they are dreaming of for college, careers, and beyond.

Growth is not without its challenges, of course. But we have found strength from the wide array of skills, talents, and perspectives in the LINK community: Scholars and families, staff and volunteers, Alumni and Mentors, and partners and supporters. Every one of you is essential for ensuring LINK Scholars have access to everything they need to succeed.

We trust it's possible though, because coming together is what LINK does best. That's the power of all of us, working for the good of LINK Scholars. When all of us work together, finding strength for what's next, the LINK fellowship comes to life. In these pages, you'll read about the many ways our community is thriving now that we are back to in-person programming. It's great for all of us to be all together again.

Thank you for being part of the LINK community and the impact all of us are making, together.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Toinette".

Dr. Toinette Gunn
President & CEO



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Johnson".

Ken Johnson
Chairman of the Board

WHAT DRIVES OUR MISSION?

All of us are vital to the LINK mission.

After two years of virtual and remote programming, we are back together again, in person. And it is absolutely amazing! We are thrilled to be meeting again face-to-face, with caring and cautious safeguards in place.

It's definitely better for all of us to be together. Our Scholars gain so much through the shared experiences and interactions that have always shaped the LINK fellowship. LINK was founded to bring Black students together and ensure they had the tools and resources to access a path to success. Our mission has always been personal, even as it addresses the larger systemic and structural forces that hinder Black students at a disproportionately high rate.

That is why **all of us** are vital to the LINK mission. Whatever part each one of us might play, the absence of any one of us is real and tangible. Coming together again after the pandemic affirms how important you are in this community of Scholars and parents, Mentors and cohort sponsors, Alumni and staff, and friends and supporters.

Thanks for being part of **all of us, who make the LINK mission possible.**

DIRECTIONAL STATEMENT

For Chicago to thrive, all of its young people must have the opportunity to *maximize* their potential.

LINK's goal is to mitigate the effect of systemic and structural forces impeding Black students by improving and increasing educational opportunities and access. By equipping our Scholars with the knowledge, skills, resources, and social equity that further college completion and career placement, LINK is increasing the economic mobility and stability of Black students and cultivating a diverse leadership pipeline for our city.

Since 2000, 100% of LINK Scholars have been accepted to a selective or highly selective college or university.



*Colleges and universities offering acceptances to LINK Scholars over the past five years.

LINK Mentors are ALL IN!

So much has changed since LINK began in 1966. But one thing that's been a constant? The steady foundation provided by men and women who volunteer as Mentors to our Scholars.

Our Scholars' growth and future success is fueled by the unique relationship that develops between them and their LINK Mentor. We match civic-minded professionals from across a wide range of industries—from education and business to finance and medicine—who all share one goal: to invest in their Scholar for the duration of the four-year fellowship.

The mentorship experience runs throughout every aspect of the LINK fellowship and is a true example of intergenerational collaboration. Serving as a Mentor highlights the power of relationships and the positive impact they can have in a person's life. That's why we've developed mentor training to support the various seasons of the Scholar/Mentor relationship. Mentors nurture a relationship with their Scholars via academic, professional, and social engagements. We've often found that these mentoring relationships also greatly enrich the lives of the Mentors as much as the Scholars.

The work of LINK Mentors ensures a better world for ourselves and upcoming generations, we must invest in their preparation. Increasing access and opportunity can become life-changing experiences, especially for Black youth.



Six Years of Potential Impact

Our two fellowship programs in action.



The diagram for the Middle School jr.LINK Fellowship Model is a circular graphic. At the top, it says "MIDDLE SCHOOL". In the center, the "jr.LINK" logo is displayed above the words "FELLOWSHIP MODEL". At the bottom, it says "2-YEAR ENRICHMENT & SUPPORT". Below the circle are four icons in purple circles, each followed by a text label: a pencil and paper icon for "Academic Enrichment", a speech bubble icon for "Leadership Development", a school building icon for "High School Options", and a graduation cap icon for "College Exposure".



The diagram for the High School LINK Unlimited Scholars Fellowship Model is a circular graphic. At the top, it says "HIGH SCHOOL". In the center, the "LINK Unlimited Scholars" logo is displayed above the words "FELLOWSHIP MODEL". At the bottom, it says "4-YEAR MENTORSHIP SUPPORT". Below the circle are four icons in purple circles, each followed by a text label: a pencil and paper icon for "Academic Enrichment", a speech bubble icon for "Leadership Development", a briefcase icon for "Career Exposure", and a graduation cap icon for "College Access".

“Being a LINK Mentor is a *rewarding experience*. As mentors, we contribute to and observe the impact we have on our Scholar. We believe that our relationship provides our Scholar additional access and opportunity, and we hope that our participation in our Scholar’s life will have a lasting impact on his future.”

Erin & Greg Mathurin
LINK Mentors

Read the Mathurins’ story on page 16!

Class of 2025 introduced the largest LINK Scholar class ever!

As Cohort Sponsors, Chicago businesses Mesirow and Kirkland & Ellis made a four-year commitment to invest in Black youth today who will be the professionals and leaders of our city tomorrow.

Mesirow and Kirkland employees also serve as LINK Mentors, partnered one-on-one with a Scholar for four years. Both firms have an overarching goal to hire and retain talent from our city's South and West sides, which is why they've partnered with us to deepen our reach & support in 10 focused neighborhoods.

Mesirow

Mesirow is an independent, employee-owned financial services firm. Headquartered in Chicago with offices around the world, Mesirow serves clients through a personal, custom approach to reaching financial goals and acting as a force for social good.

Learn more at [mesirow.com](https://www.mesirow.com)

KIRKLAND & ELLIS

Kirkland & Ellis LLP is an international law firm with more than 2,700 attorneys in 15 cities around the world. Kirkland is committed to advancing communities, dedicating substantial energy, talent, and resources to meaningful causes and initiatives.

Learn more at [kirkland.com](https://www.kirkland.com)

Continuing our expanded impact with another cohort of Scholars.

To change the lives of more Scholars and to make a profound city-wide impact, many partners are needed.



With the support of GMC Grosvenor, Linden Capital Partners, and the Thomas M. & Julie E. Scott Foundation, the Class of 2026 freshmen Scholars are embarking on their four-year high-school fellowship. Like the Class of 2025, our 2026 cohort is nearly double the usual size because key investment partners make it possible to expand our programmatic framework to sustain more Scholars through their 4-year fellowship journey.

Our plans for growth are aggressive—because our fellowship model works. College degrees are still a deciding factor for future success and economic stability, which is why we must open the path to college for our Scholars.

The continued commitment of all our donors, sponsors, and partners help ensure LINK Scholars have access to a path of success, to secure the bright future that's possible when we all work together. THANK YOU!

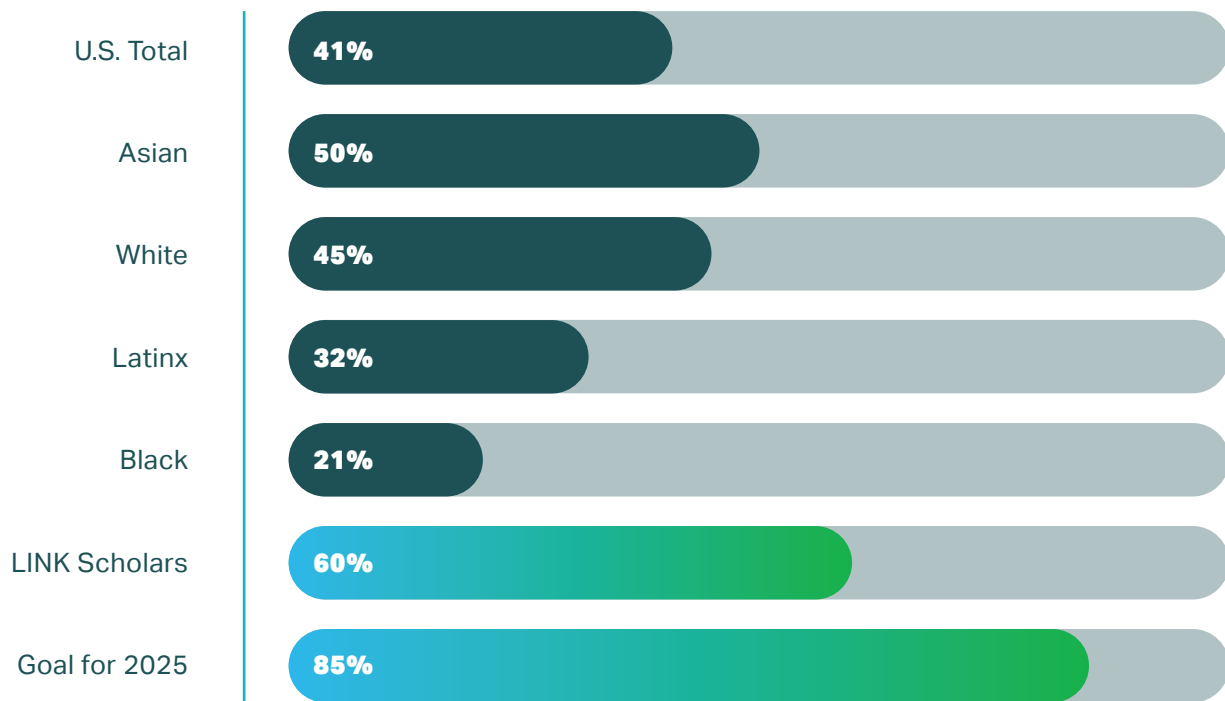
Addressing limited access for Chicago's students.

One of Chicago's biggest challenges is a system that exacerbates historical educational gaps for Black students. Black students are disproportionately impacted by systemic and structural forces that impede their ability to access opportunities, gain economic mobility, and become the community leaders our city needs.

The lack of access to educational opportunities and resources has a devastating impact, as seen in low rates of high school graduation, college acceptance, and college graduation. Even if Black students somehow defy the odds by graduating from high school, getting accepted to college, and graduating from college, their college debt weighs them down for decades to come.

By the Numbers

U.S. College Graduate Rates - 4 Years



**LINK Scholars 4-Year College Graduation Rate, 2011-2015*



Fact & Figures

¹ Without a college degree, earnings are

\$24K
LESS PER YEAR
for a total lifetime loss of
\$1M

² **85%**

of Black college students
CARRY DEBT

Almost half of African American graduates owe more on their undergraduate student loans four years after graduation than they did when they received their degree, compared to 17% of white graduates.³

² On average it takes



25 years

FOR BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS

to pay back college debt, as compared to just

10 YEARS FOR WHITE COLLEGE GRADUATES

¹Elka Torpey, "Measuring the value of education," Career Outlook, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 2018.

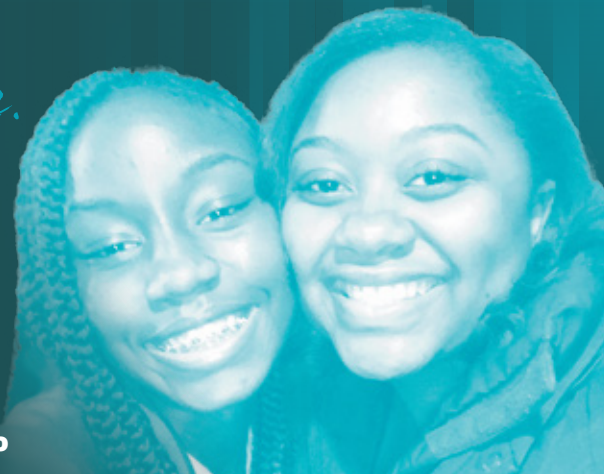
²CNBC 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/19/student-debt-continues-to-climb-heres-how-much-graduates-now-owe.html>

³Brookings Institute, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/black-white-disparity-in-student-loan-debt-more-than-triples-after-graduation>

All of us make a *difference.*

Black students in Chicago deserve equal access to educational opportunities that open the pathway to college and beyond. College admission, financial support, and on-time graduation are possible with the resources and tools.

With your continued support, LINK Scholars gain access to everything they need for success on all fronts: academic, professional, personal, and social. Thanks for investing in LINK Scholars!



Aniya Wright //
LINK Scholar
Mentee

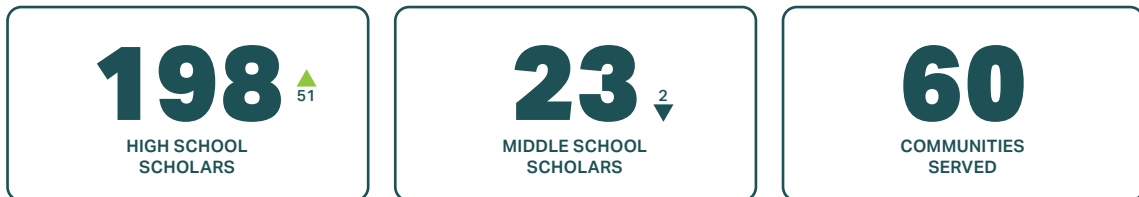
Hunter Guy
LINK Alumni
Mentor

OUR IMPACT TOGETHER

Opening the pathway for Scholar success.

Our fellowship is serving more Scholars than ever before thanks to growing partnerships with individuals and organizations. Here's a recap of our programmatic activities from the past year that open the way for Scholar success. Thank you for making it possible!

SCHOLARS SERVED



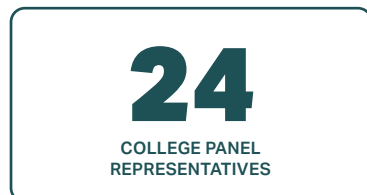
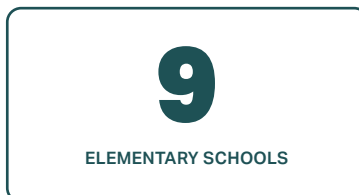
CORPORATE & FOUNDATION SUPPORT



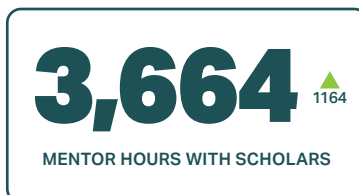
VOLUNTEER SUPPORT



80 EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS



MENTOR SUPPORT



▲ increase since last year

* including LINK Mentors

▼ decrease since last year

2021-2022 FELLOWSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

A one-of-a-kind fellowship for individualized Scholar growth.



Leadership Development

Leadership development focused on identity and problem-solving in Saturday Academy, as Scholars engaged with novels and nonfiction texts that tackled topics around gender, race, class, and adolescence and how one's experiences shape perceptions and decisions. Our cohort retreats helped Scholars further reflect on their own experiences, as they define and redefine who they are, share their stories, and identify the legacy they want to leave. Based on our Scholar feedback surveys, seventy-eight percent (78%) of Scholars shared they feel their leadership has grown this year because of LINK.



Academic Enrichment

This year, during Saturday Academy, Scholars practiced digital literacy and storytelling by engaging with texts, discussions, and projects that explored the theme *Rewriting Our Stories*. Scholars culminated the year by collaborating on a digital visual anthology with poetry, prose, and mini-graphic novels exhibiting them across four virtual galleries.



Career Exposure

Through our 20+ career panels and workshops throughout the year, Scholars heard from professionals in various sectors, such as healthcare, entrepreneurship, film, media, journalism, STEM, visual/design, finance, marketing, management, and retail. Monthly career workshops covered skills such as resume building and marketing with social media. Scholars also had access to exclusive career workshops such as two design labs with Footlocker, a virtual sports career workshop series with the CUBS, and a filmmaker workshop with One Earth Film Fest.



College Access

Scholars had opportunities to engage with 24 college admission representatives throughout the year. We launched a new college-bound workshop series for seniors to address topics like Black identity development, combatting imposter syndrome, budgeting, roommate boundaries and conflict resolution, understanding financial aid awards, values-based leadership, choosing the right school, supporting mental health, and seeking student support on campus.

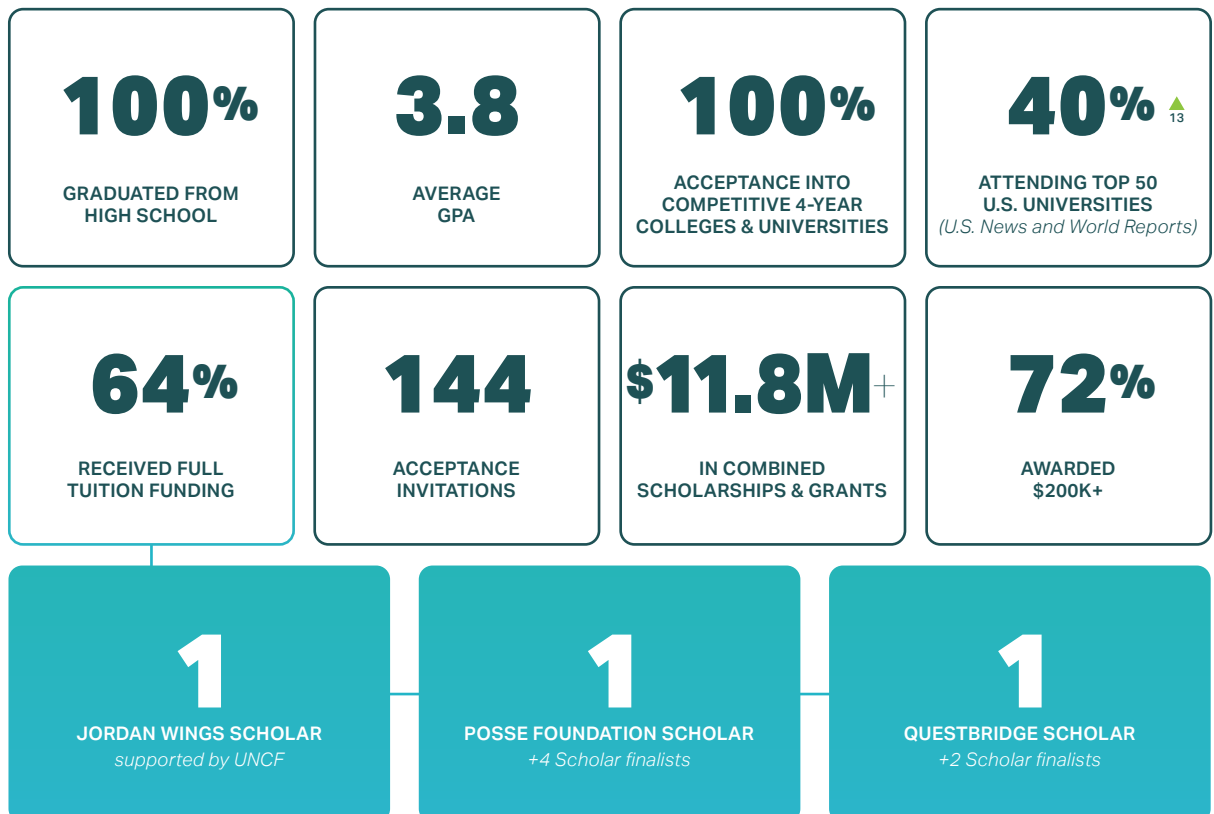
2021–2022 FELLOWSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Give it up for our 2022 GRADUATES!



We're cheering loud and long for the LINK Scholars Class of 2022. Their dedication over the past four years was amazing—they graduated with honors, with college offers, and with big dreams for the future. All this is possible thanks to your investment in them. Congratulations Class of 2022!

Look at what these amazing Scholars accomplished!



SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHT

Tamaine is *stepping up* because of LINK.

Much has changed since Tamaine Hills started his LINK fellowship journey more than four years ago:

“I heard about LINK through my grammar school and principal Mr. Stalling. I chose LINK because it seemed like a great program focusing on promising Black students. LINK makes a difference because it brings you close to a Black community of teachers and students who all strive to make you and themselves better.”

Tamaine leaned into the LINK community, growing close to his LINK Mentor, Arthur Reliford Jr. After graduating from Brother Rice High School, Tamaine accepted an invitation from DePaul University, where he is now attending as a freshman. This young man has grown and matured in every way, thanks to the LINK high school fellowship.

Tamaine shares:

“LINK has definitely made me more of a morning person! And it has made me a leader, stepping up for my peers when they need it. What I appreciate most about LINK is that it's more like family. They always put a smile on your face. They may demand attendance and other things, but it prepares you for the real world. I didn't complain when they asked, because I knew college would be the same.”

We cannot wait to see how Tamaine continues to grow at DePaul and as a LINK Alumnus! Thanks for investing so he can pursue his dreams for college, a career, and beyond.

A portrait of Tamaine Hills, a young Black man with a short haircut, smiling warmly. He is wearing a light-colored suit jacket over a white shirt and a dark bow tie. The background is a solid teal color.

Tamaine Hills
LINK Alumnus /// Class of 2022

Carving an impressive path to success.

Jr. LINK began two years ago to create pathways to opportunities for middle school students. The two-year fellowship model provides students with support and resources to enhance academic performance, engage in social emotional learning, experience true high school choice, and mitigate transitional GPA decline from middle school to freshman year.

Although Jr. LINK is still a new offering, already it is evolving—becoming a more robust and impactful program under the LINK fellowship umbrella. Jr. LINK is growing with a deeper connection and presence in CPS/Charter schools in our target neighborhoods. We aim to become a premiere resource for middle school students on the South and West sides of the city to assist with pathways into Chicago’s best high schools and provide true school choice. LINK ensures middle school students have access to every opportunity on their way to high school, college, career, and beyond.

YEAR-AT-A-GLANCE

2021–2022

23 
**SCHOLARS IN
THE FELLOWSHIP**

50 STUDENTS ENGAGED

 **100+**
**PROGRAMMING
HOURS**

20 
**SESSIONS OF
SCHOLASTIC
SUPPORT**

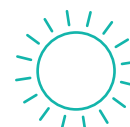
 **4** WEEKS
**OF SUMMER
LEARNING**

4 BEACON SCHOOL
MODEL PARTNERS

5 INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL PARTNERS



Personal
High School
Selection Support

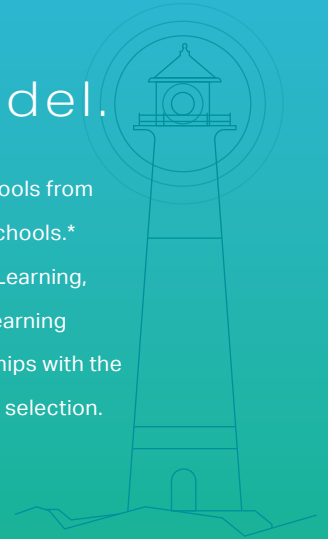


Summer
Enrichment
Electives

Introducing the Beacon School Model.

This year we launched the Beacon School Model, allowing LINK to partner with CPS/Charter middle schools from our focused neighborhoods. Together, we are building a cohort of 7th and 8th graders at four partner schools.* Cohorts have access to most of the high school fellowship programming (Saturday Academy, Summer Learning, Career Workshops, etc.). We provide school-site touchpoints that include academic/social-emotional learning sessions for both parents and Scholars. The Beacon School Model allows LINK to foster deep partnerships with the teachers to monitor and support Scholar progress for maximum success as they move into high school selection.

**Any Jr. LINK Scholars who attend schools outside of the Beacon School Model are invited to after-school touchpoints that are in close geographic proximity and receive all the same support.*



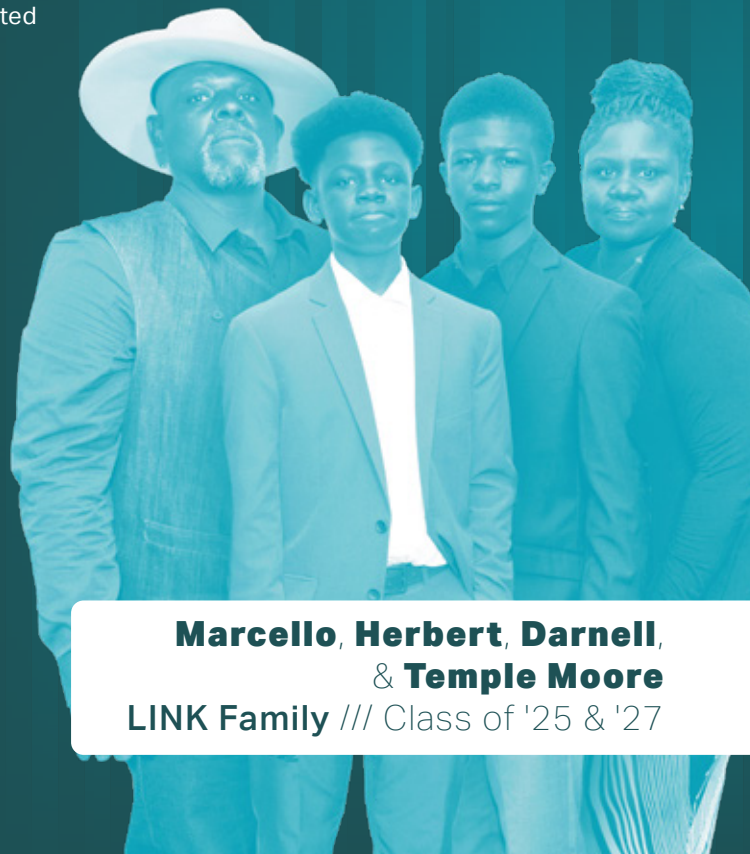
Meet the *Moore* Family

When it comes to her family, Mrs. Moore is laser-focused. Both Mr. and Mrs. Moore want their sons, Darnell and Herbert, to have every opportunity, which led them to LINK back in March of 2020. **With support from LINK's fellowship, both sons are on the path to college success.**

Darnell is now a sophomore at Jones College Prep and dreams of becoming a civil or mechanical engineer. He is a member of the debate team and the Black Student Union; he also enjoys boxing and reading graphic novels.

Herbert is an 8th-grader at National Teachers Academy. He has a passion for social justice and history, and enjoys reading. **Jr. LINK has been a tremendous source of support for Herbert and Mrs. Moore over the past year and a half.** Herbert has benefitted from two years of our Summer Learning academic accelerator, where he has been challenged and exposed to rigorous, and culturally relevant curriculum. He's had access to numerous internal and external high school fairs, including an intimate LINK-hosted Q+A with Whitney Young principal Rickey Harris. And the one-on-one high school counseling offered with Jr. LINK case management has been essential as Herbert and the Moores consider his high school options.

The LINK fellowship has provided both Moore sons with tutoring support, high school choice counseling, help navigating socio-emotional concerns, and as many positive experiences as possible! The Moore family has become one of the most engaged families at LINK. **Their family is now part of ours. We look forward to walking with both Moore Scholars during their respective fellowship journeys!**



**Marcello, Herbert, Darnell,
& Temple Moore**
LINK Family /// Class of '25 & '27

LINK
MENTOR
HIGHLIGHT

Meet *Erin & Greg* Mathurin,



Why is the LINK Mentor Program so powerful? First, it's been the support system behind our model since LINK's beginning, so it's a refined and proven component of our fellowship. Second, it's rooted in relationships, connecting Scholars to the larger LINK community where they find support, access, and meaningful life and career advice. The LINK Mentorship draws amazing people who want to invest in the next generation—people like Erin and Greg Mathurin.

Already active in their community, the Mathurins were looking for additional ways to help young Black children and teenagers grow and increase the likelihood they could reach their full potential.

They share that:

“Unfortunately, many Black children are not provided access and exposure to the networks and opportunities that could help prepare them for future academic and professional challenges. We benefited from support and encouragement from family, friends, and community and that provided a foundation for us to achieve what we have today.”

Erin and Greg found that opportunity with LINK:

LINK Mentors.



Greg, Jasir & Erin

“We realized what was possible through LINK based on the stories our friend, Barbara Dunlap, shared about her experiences with the program. We believe that to whom much is given, much is required, so we gladly give our time and money to help Black youth navigate their academic career and expose them to programs designed to enhance their social growth and future success.”

We matched them with Jasir, a sophomore at Walter Payton High School, and they have greatly enjoyed partnering with him and his mother:

“Our goal is to positively influence him and reinforce the teachings of his parents to provide additional perspective on how to leverage school and activities to reach his life goals. Jasir is highly intelligent, extremely talented, and very motivated, and we anticipated that our relationship with him would deepen after each interaction. It is exciting to also share that his qualities helped broaden our perspective, and we learn something new after each meeting. In addition, we’ve increased our knowledge of pop culture which, at times, impresses our own teenage son!”

Their son entered high school a year after Jasir.

“Both have similar interests, and it has been fun exposing them to various cultural events in the city,” Erin explains. **“In addition, we have experienced a level of fulfillment from being able to see the impact we are making in our Scholar’s life.”**

This mutual edification is a beautiful byproduct of the LINK Mentorship. From the volunteers who are LINK Mentors to the friends who support the Mentorship program, we are very grateful for the relationships within the LINK community.

Watch our MENTOR HIGHLIGHT VIDEO



I A M LINK'S
LEGACY

2021–2022 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

JULY 1, 2021–JUNE 30, 2022

Investing for Scholar success.

Thanks to generous friends and partners like you, LINK Scholars are growing and moving forward on the path of lifelong success. Your financial gifts have had an immeasurable impact on LINK Scholars, their families, and our city as a whole!

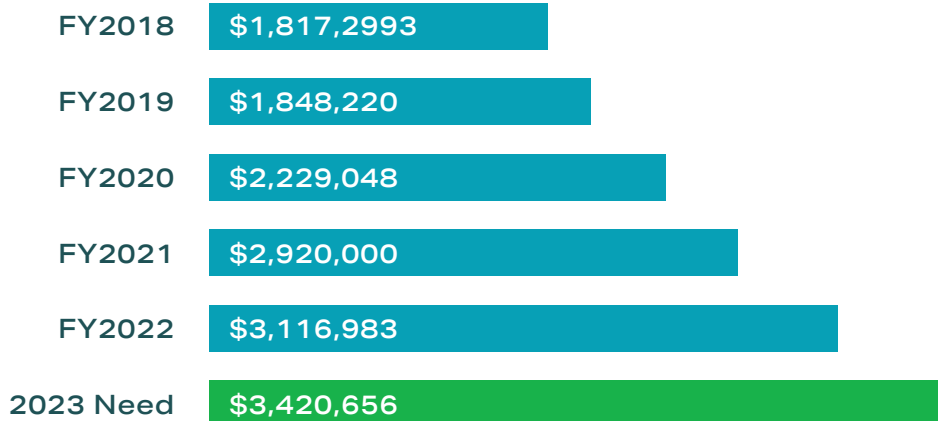
Because you gave through LINK Unlimited Scholars this past year, our fellowship offering has continued to provide full support for Scholars as they move to, through, and beyond college.

We are grateful for our partners in this mission that so positively changes the life trajectory of each Scholar and the professional landscape of our city.

Annual Revenue by Year /// Based on unaudited financial reports

Over the past five years, generous partners of LINK Unlimited Scholars have spurred significant growth to invest in LINK Scholars and build tomorrow's Black leaders today.

OUR GROWTH

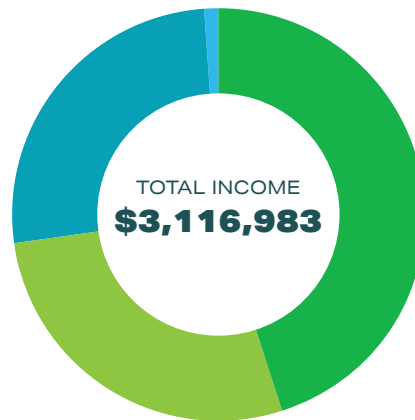


Investment Summary

/// Based on unaudited financial reports

Generous partners invested in LINK Scholars with one-time and multi-year commitments to build tomorrow's Black leaders today. Here's a snapshot of the impact your gifts are making collectively for LINK Scholars:

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| ● Foundations | 45% (\$1,218,019) |
| ● Individuals | 28% (\$873,718) |
| ● Corporations | 26% (\$795,486) |
| ● Government & Other | 1% (\$35,976) |

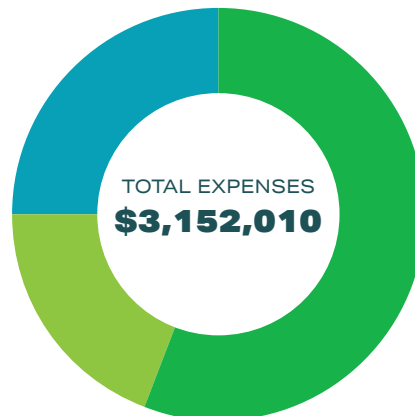


Highest Impact to Date

/// Based on unaudited financial reports

Last year's growth enabled us to invest in more LINK Scholars than ever before. Here's how your investment is building tomorrow's Black leaders today:

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| ● Program Services | 62% (\$1,954,246) |
| ● Development | 20% (\$630,402) |
| ● Administration | 18% (\$597,362) |



Our five-year strategic priorities.

Priority #1

Deepen Our Reach

We're directing missional efforts toward 10 South and West Side neighborhoods.

We believe the impact of the LINK fellowship for these students can be the greatest impetus for long-lasting change for our city.

Our impact for these Scholars is growing year over year. Some highlights of this past year's progress include:

100%

RETENTION RATE

from 2021–2022 academic school year for Scholars from the focused neighborhoods.

52%

OF LINK SCHOLARS

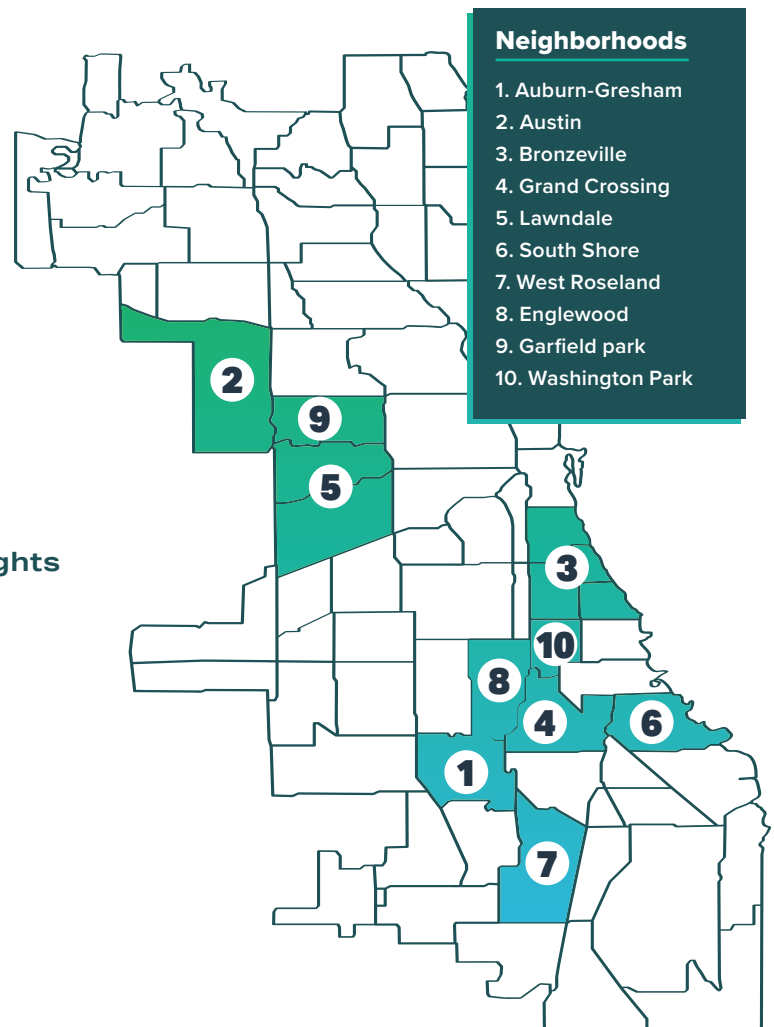
were from the focused neighborhoods.

• **57%**

Class of 2025 Scholars are currently from our focused neighborhoods.

• **52%**

Class of 2026 Scholars are currently from our focused neighborhoods.



Priority #2

Broaden Our Horizons

This past year, we've broadened Jr. LINK connections by partnering with four schools:

KIPP:BLOOM
ENGLEWOOD

KIPP:ASCEND
NORTH LAWDALE

KIPP:ACADEMY
AUSTIN



We call it the Beacon School Model.

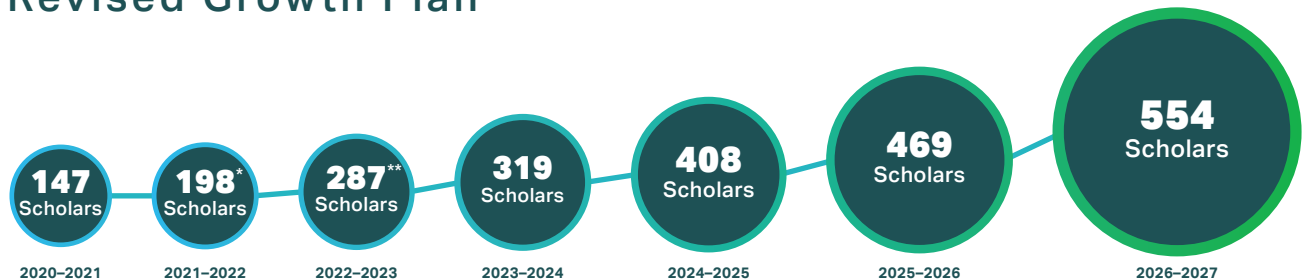
This new partnership with CPS/Charter middle schools is building a cohort of 7th and 8th graders who discover the LINK offering early enough to receive the full support it offers. We are building relationships with the administrative teams, teachers, and families, which will lead to more LINK Scholars from the focused neighborhoods in years to come.

Priority #3

Class of 2025 & 2026

Our strategic milestone is to reach 500 students by 2025. Our goal is to grow the cohort size each year to create a long-lasting impact across the city.

Revised Growth Plan



Partners are essential. We are always looking for new partners, opportunities for collaboration, and introductions to those interested in joining and supporting the LINK mission.

* Includes 110 Class of 2025 Scholars

** Includes 80 Class of 2026 Scholars

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LINK UNLIMITED SCHOLARS /// IMPACT REPORT 2021-2022

President's Office

Dr. Toinette Gunn /// President & CEO

Vanessa N. Lewis /// Chief of Staff

Programs

Dr. Jacquelin Baker /// Vice President, Programs and Evaluation

Lamar Sanders /// Director, Scholar Recruitment

Candace Witt /// Director, Scholar Support

Joshua Wiggins /// Director, Curriculum and Educational Programs

Angelica Dawson /// Manager, Scholar Recruitment

Shamerea Richards /// Senior Manager, Scholar Support

Vilma Fermin /// Manager, Educational Programs and Volunteer Support

Rhiannon Rossi /// Director, Mentor Engagement

Bria Matemane /// Scholar Support Associate

Khadijat Dosunmu /// Scholar Support Associate

Finance and Operations

Lydia Jackson /// Data Manager

Anicia Miller /// Finance & Operations Associate

Development

Jennifer Lennon /// Director, Fund Development

Marketing and Communications

Brittni Cullar /// Director, Marketing and Communications



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