



Impact Report

2019 - 2024



SOUTHERN
SCHOLARS
INITIATIVE

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Jaela graduating with her Bachelor of Science

A Note From Our Executive Director

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Stakeholders,

It is with immense pride and gratitude that we present the first-ever Impact Report of the Dr. Doretha Pressey Southern Scholars Initiative. This report is a testament to our journey, our challenges, and our triumphs over the past five years. When we embarked on this mission, we had a vision to create access, equity, and success for students of color from low-income communities in rural South Carolina. Today, as we reflect on our progress, we are reminded of the collective effort, dedication, and unwavering support that has brought us to this milestone.

Since our inception, Southern Scholars Initiative has been steadfast in its commitment to transforming lives through education. Guided by the principles of **Education, Determination, and Generosity**, we have awarded over \$285,000 in scholarships and more than \$10,000 in emergency aid to 18 Scholars. Our Scholars have demonstrated exceptional academic excellence, maintaining an average GPA of 3.4 or better.

This report highlights the impactful programs and initiatives that have been the cornerstone of our success. Our world-class college completion advising program, robust mentorship initiative, and strategic partnerships with esteemed organizations like NCAN, The College Board, InternXL, Level All, and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., have played pivotal roles in supporting our Scholars' journeys.

Moreover, the Southern Scholars Initiative's commitment to community engagement has fostered meaningful relationships and garnered support from private donors, corporate sponsors, and local community organizations. These collaborations have been instrumental in breaking the cycle of poverty in Bamberg and Orangeburg Counties, empowering our Scholars to pursue higher education and build a brighter future.

However, like many Black-led, Black-benefiting grassroots organizations, we face significant challenges in securing consistent funding. Despite the undeniable success of our programs, the funding landscape remains deeply inequitable. The 2024 State of Black Nonprofits Report by Giving Gap reveals that Black-led nonprofits typically receive 76% less revenue and hold 24% fewer net assets than their white-led counterparts. Furthermore, only 2% of all philanthropic funding from the nation's largest foundations is specifically directed to Black communities. **For Southern Scholars Initiative, this means that while our impact is undeniable, our ability to sustain and scale our programs is often constrained by the lack of financial resources. We need your continued and increased support to ensure that we can not only maintain but expand our efforts to uplift and empower our country's next generation of leaders (Giving Gap, 2024).**

As we look ahead, we remain focused on our strategic priorities for growth and sustainability. Our vision for the future includes program enhancement, financial growth, marketing and media expansion, increased community engagement, and the development of our dedicated team and Board of Directors. We are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and the continued impact we can make together.

This 5-Year Impact Report is more than a summary of our achievements; it is a celebration of the lives we have touched and a reaffirmation of our mission. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who have supported us on this journey. Your belief in our vision and your generous contributions have made this progress possible.

I also want to take a moment to honor my amazing mother, **Dr. Doretha Pressey**, whose legacy of dedication, resilience, and advocacy for education has been the guiding light for our organization. Her unwavering commitment to empowering students of color and her vision for a more equitable society continue to inspire and drive our mission forward. My Mother's influence is woven into the fabric of everything we do, and her spirit of generosity and determination lives on through the success of our Scholars.

We invite you to join us as we continue to empower, inspire, and transform the lives of Scholars, ensuring that education remains a powerful tool for change. Together, we will create a future where every student has the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

With deep gratitude,



Executive Director

Dr. Doretha Pressey Southern Scholars Initiative, Inc.

Education, Determination, Generosity

OUR MISSION

The Dr. Doretha Pressey Southern Scholars Initiative is a 501c3 nonprofit scholarship and college completion program dedicated to creating access, equity, and success for students of color from historically resilient communities in rural South Carolina. We are motivated and guided by the legacy of Dr. Doretha Pressey, a passionate and determined educator who committed her life to generously helping those in need. Education, Determination, and Generosity were three of the core principles that exemplified Dr. Pressey's life and work and they have become the three major tenets upon which our work is based.

Southern Scholars provides a foundation of financial, community, and career support necessary for Scholar success. We exist to dismantle the barriers that students of color from the Rural South so often face when pursuing higher education. In turn, our Scholars learn the skills necessary to become successful in their careers and upstanding advocates for their communities.

We believe that education is not merely a pathway but that it is the key to breaking generational cycles of poverty.



Larry receiving his Dr. Doretha Pressey Scholarship from our Chairman at his part-time job

“We believe that education is not merely a pathway but that it is the key to breaking generational cycles of poverty.”

Our History

Dr. Doretha Pressey, born on February 18, 1961, in Bamberg, SC, was a trailblazer in education and a beacon of inspiration. She pursued her education at Voorhees College, earning a Bachelor of Science in History, Education, and Educational Policy, along with an Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice. She continued her academic journey with a Master's degree in Educational Administration from American International College and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Education Supervision. In 1997, Dr. Pressey achieved a Doctorate in Education, Policy, Research, and Administration from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, becoming the first in her family to reach this level of academic success.

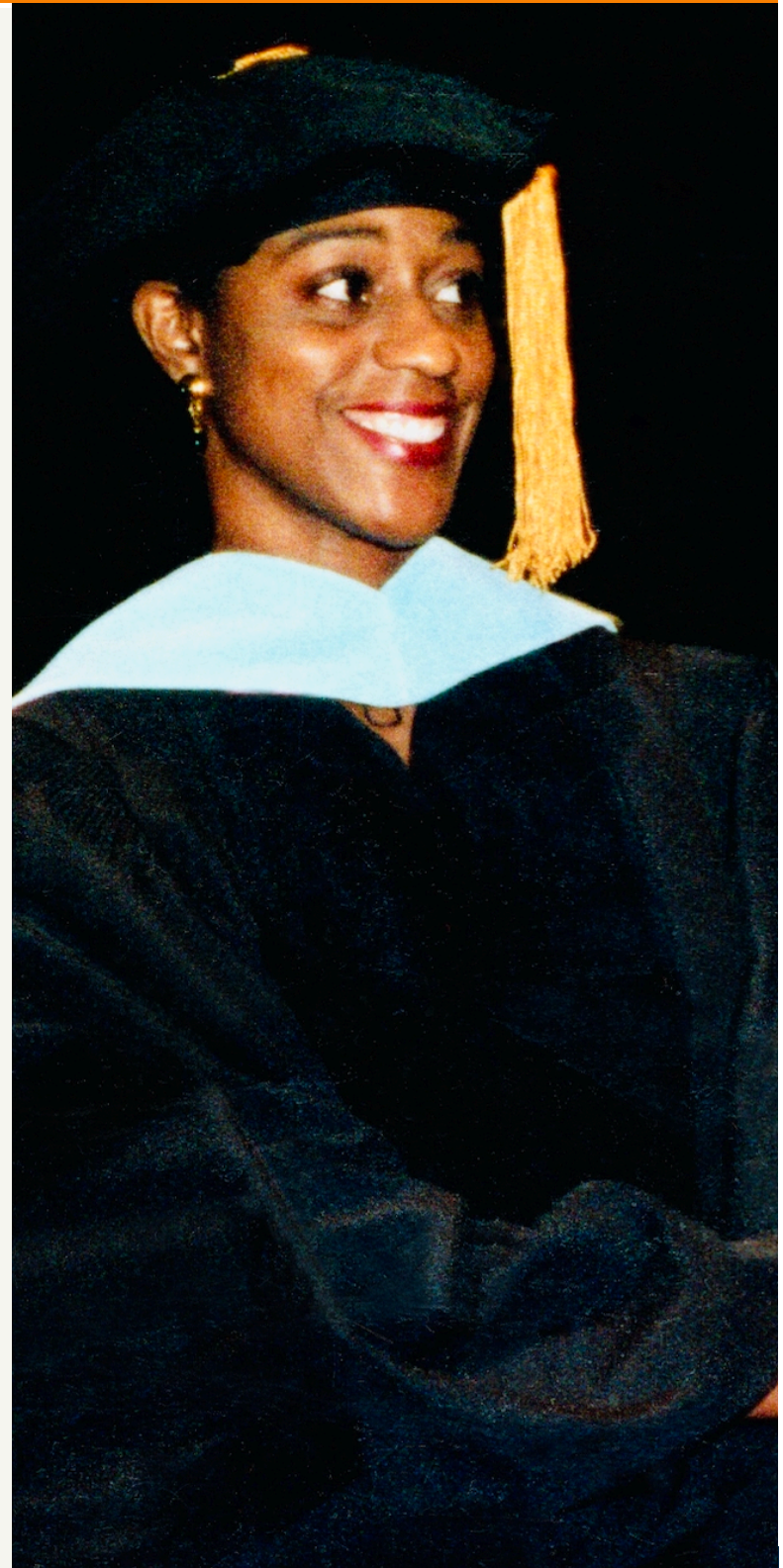
A middle child of 7 boys and girls, Dr. Pressey and her siblings were deeply inspired by their mother, **Clara Mae Coleman**. Although Mrs. Coleman was unable to complete high school, she taught all of her children and grandchildren to fiercely value education.

Dr. Pressey's career began as a teacher's aide in Denmark, SC. Her innovative teaching methods and compassionate discipline quickly propelled her to the role of high school History teacher and then assistant principal in Springfield, MA, where she was one of the youngest women to hold that position in the city's history. Later, she became a beloved Professor of Education at Morgan State University, also teaching at Chestnut Hill College, Mt. Holyoke University, Cambridge College, and Montgomery Community College.

Driven by her belief that every child deserves the opportunity to achieve their dreams, Dr. Pressey founded STOP: The Support Teen Outreach Program, a nonprofit dedicated to helping at-risk youth and underserved families. The Southern Scholars Initiative is an extension of this visionary work, continuing her legacy of educational empowerment and community support.

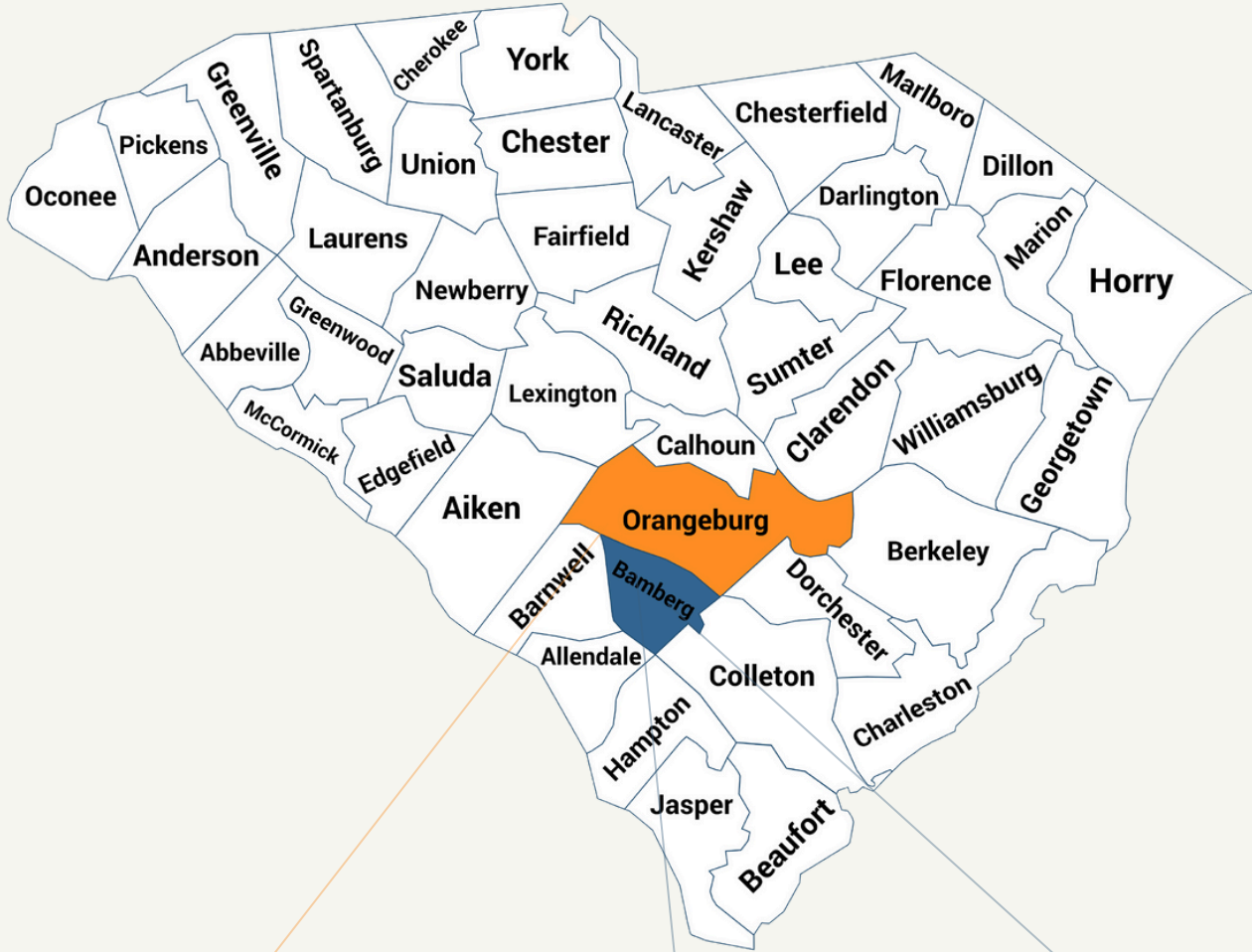
Known for her profoundly generous spirit, Dr. Pressey was always ready to help others, prioritizing her family despite a demanding career. Dr. Pressey passed away unexpectedly in 2018, and her family established the Southern Scholars Initiative in her honor.

Dr. Pressey's legacy lives on through the Southern Scholars Initiative, which continues to inspire and support students, reflecting her lifelong commitment to education and service.



Dr. Doretha Pressey
Namesake of and inspiration for
the Dr. Doretha Pressey Southern
Scholars Initiative, Inc.

Service Areas



Over

80%

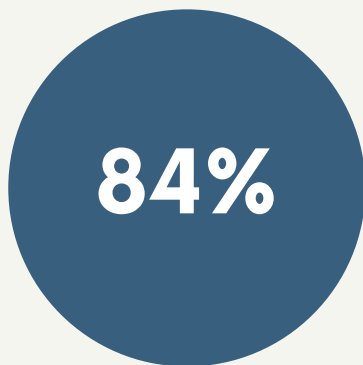
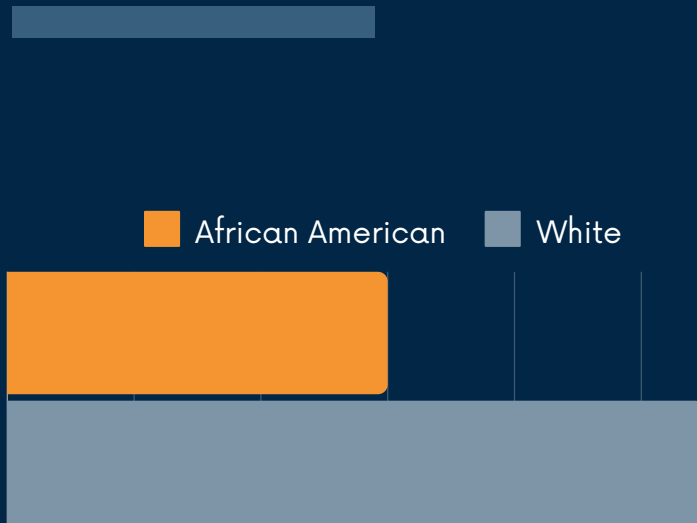
of Bamberg County and Orangeburg County students live in poverty ¹



Only about

30%

of African American students obtained a college degree in four years, which was 25% lower than their White peers ²



Studies consistently demonstrate that completing college significantly reduces poverty rates, with bachelor's degree holders earning an astonishing 84% more over their lifetime than high school graduates. ³

¹ SC Department of Education Data

² SC Commission of Higher Education

³ Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce

18

SCHOLARS SUPPORTED

OUR IMPACT

Over the past five years, the Dr. Doretha Pressey Southern Scholars Initiative has proudly supported 18 Scholars with a total of \$300,000 in scholarships and emergency aid (housing, books, technology needs, etc.) Our dedication to academic excellence is evident in our Scholars' impressive 100% persistence rate and their average GPA of 3.4 or higher. Among our achievements, we celebrate the graduation of three Scholars, with one now pursuing a PhD.

\$285K

In Scholarships
Awarded

We have established valuable partnerships with three high schools across two school districts, extending our reach and impact. Our commitment to holistic development is further demonstrated through three enriching Summer Immersion Travel Experiences (SITE), with a fourth planned for 2025, providing our Scholars with invaluable experiences and opportunities for growth.

100%

PERSISTENCE RATE

A cornerstone of our success has been the development of our **Five Pillars of Scholar Success**. These pillars encompass Scholarship, Academic Coaching, Career Readiness and Mentorship, Service, and Travel, providing a comprehensive framework that supports our Scholars in achieving their academic and personal goals.

\$0

Debt at Graduation
for All Scholars

These accomplishments highlight our ongoing mission to empower students through education and to foster meaningful, positive change in their lives and communities.

3.4

Average GPA

3

High School Partners in
2 School Districts Served

\$10K+

In Emergency Grants
Awarded

3

Graduates

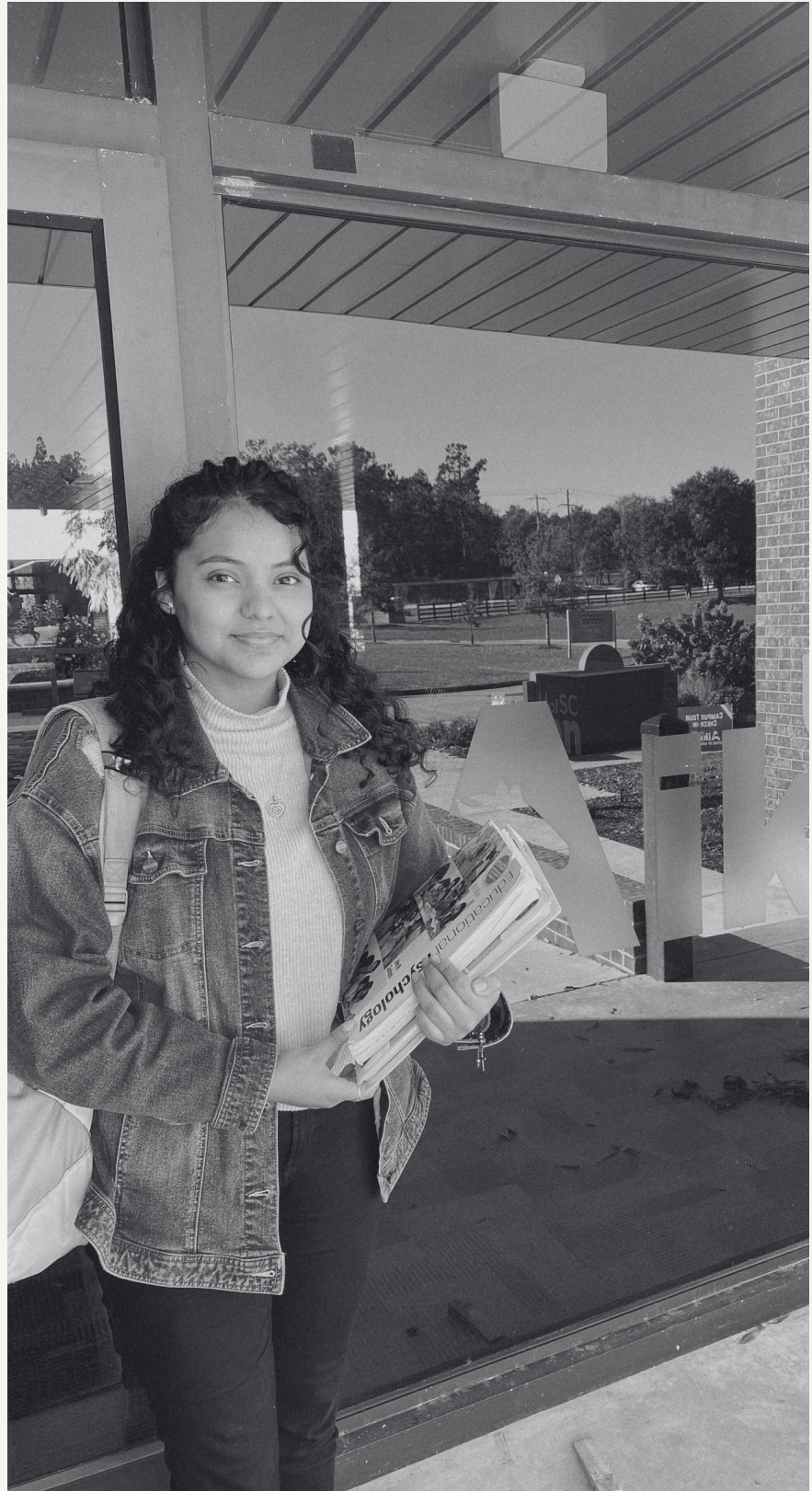
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Pillars of Scholar
Success

3

Summer Immersion
Travel Experiences

OUR IMPACT



Shelia Serrano Flores, Scholar Class of 2019

18

Scholars Supported
Over 5 Years

\$300,000

In Scholarship and Emergency Aid Awarded



We believe that every young person should have the opportunity to embark on a journey of education and self-discovery. Sadly, many students in the historically resilient communities we serve have never ventured beyond their home state due to limited resources and opportunities.

At Southern Scholars, we are committed to changing the narrative by providing our students with the chance to explore culturally significant destinations around the country .

Five Pillars Of Scholar Success

The Five Pillars of Scholar Success provide a comprehensive framework designed to support and empower our Scholars. These pillars encompass Scholarship, offering financial support to minimize barriers to education, and Academic Coaching, providing personalized guidance to address academic and personal challenges. Career Readiness and Mentorship connect Scholars with mentors and professional development opportunities, while the Service pillar instills a sense of community and social responsibility. Lastly, the Travel pillar offers transformative experiences to broaden horizons and cultural understanding. Together, these pillars ensure our Scholars are well-equipped to achieve their academic and personal goals.

PILLAR	CONTENT	RESULT
Scholarship	Up to \$18,000 In scholarship assistance.	Graduate from college with little to no debt
Academic Life Coaching	Personalized, 1-on-1, holistic guidance	Direct support to help navigate barriers and obstacles
Career Readiness and Mentorship	A professional mentor paired based on their interests and expertise	Scholars are equipped for a seamless transition from college to career success
Service and Advocacy	Support identifying opportunities to serve their communities	Leadership development through individual reflection, generosity, and collaboration
Travel & Exploration	Annual travel opportunity to a culturally significant destination	Broadened perspectives, enriched educational experiences

Mapping the Journey



Sheila Serrano Flores joined us in 2019 as our first Mrs. Clara Mae Coleman Award recipient. We were incredibly impressed by her academic record and her strong desire to give back and help others.

Sheila graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2022 from the University of South Carolina at Aiken with a degree in Education. She's now a bilingual preschool teacher, shaping the minds of the next generation in her community.



Larry Sanders, our very first Dr. Doretha Pressey Scholarship recipient, is known for his strong work ethic and caring nature. He started studying at South Carolina State University in 2019.

Larry has since graduated with his Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering Technology. He is now preparing to enter the workforce and become a member of the next generation of leaders in his community.



Jaela Tyler was the 2020 recipient of the Dr. Doretha Pressey Academic Scholarship. She is incredibly bright, driven, and committed to giving back to her community.

Jaela has led an incredible college journey, having become our first Scholar to graduate with a Masters Degree. We look forward to supporting Jaela as she begins working towards her doctorate at Tuskegee University College of Veterinary Medicine.



Where Our Scholars Study



**North Carolina
Agricultural and
Technical State
University**



Our Partners



NATIONAL
COLLEGE
ATTAINMENT
NETWORK



In Our Scholars' Own Words

"Southern Scholars has helped me learn that there are people that care about my process to attain my degree. They have also guided me in the future of my major by having informative workshops."

-Raj Patel

"Southern Scholars has helped me get exposure by professional coaching, networking and being around family that isn't family."

-Brevin Samuels

Southern Scholars has helped give me resources to build academically and professionally."

-Jorell Banks

"This scholarship will help me by paying for part of my tuition. I don't want money to get in the way of my dream of going to college."

-Sheila Serrano Flores

Acknowledgments & Appreciation

Over the past five years, the Dr. Doretha Pressey Southern Scholars Initiative has been deeply grateful for the support of our donors, volunteers, and board members. More than 150 individuals have contributed to our success, helping us transform the lives of our Scholars.

With your support, we have provided \$300,000 in scholarships and emergency aid to 18 deserving students, maintaining a 100% persistence rate. Your belief in our mission has allowed us to build valuable partnerships, enrich our Scholars' experiences, and establish our comprehensive Five Pillars of Scholar Success.

We extend our deepest thanks to our dedicated volunteers and board members, whose time and effort have been invaluable. Your commitment has driven our programs forward and ensured the best possible support for our Scholars.

Your generosity and dedication have inspired hope and determination in our Scholars. You are all vital parts of our community, making a lasting impact with your kindness and compassion.

Thank you for your unwavering support. Together, we are breaking the cycle of poverty through education and making a significant difference in the lives of our Scholars.



We are grateful for your support in breaking the cycle of poverty through education.

"I've chosen to support Southern Scholars Initiative because having access to higher education is vitally important and can help us all achieve equality, diversity, and inclusion in our daily lives."

Trina Wharton, Monthly Donor

Join the Initiative

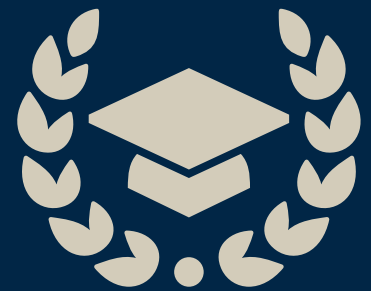


Mentor a Scholar

Mentors play a vital role in our Scholar's lives. In addition to helping them develop the skills they need to make a successful transition from college to the world of work, Mentors also inspire and motivate our Scholars to reach their full potential.

Become a Donor Partner

Donor Partners fully support an individual Scholar by covering the total cost of their scholarship and academic programs and services. Donor Partners also have the opportunity to forge supportive and meaningful relationships with each of their Scholars.



Become a Program Partner

Southern Scholars is primarily funded by the generous support of individual donors with a desire to level the academic playing field for all students. Make a contribution today, and know that you are helping create college access, equity, and success for students of color from communities throughout the rural South.



Join the Initiative



Become a Career Partner

Looking to recruit young, college-educated leaders? Career Partners are connected with hardworking Scholars looking for employment opportunities in their field.

Become an Education Partner

Southern Scholars is in the process of formalizing partnerships with colleges, universities, and career and technical schools throughout North and South Carolina to ensure that our Scholars have the academic and financial support they need to graduate on time with zero debt. If your institution would like to learn more about partnership opportunities, please contact us.

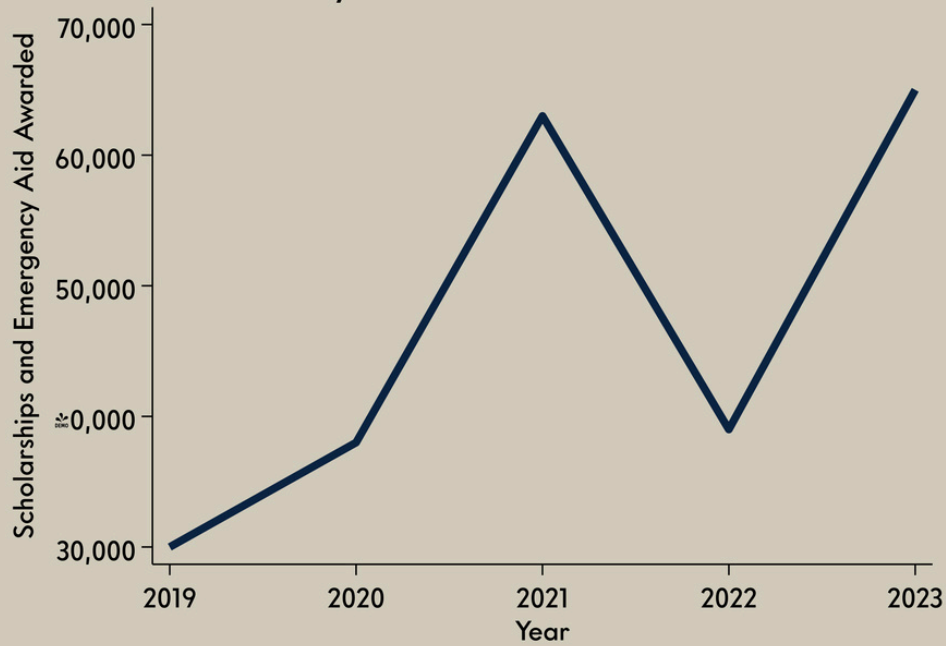


To learn more about volunteer or partnership opportunities at Southern Scholars, please email our Program Coordinator, Snow at snow@southernscholars.org or call us at 803.200.1910.

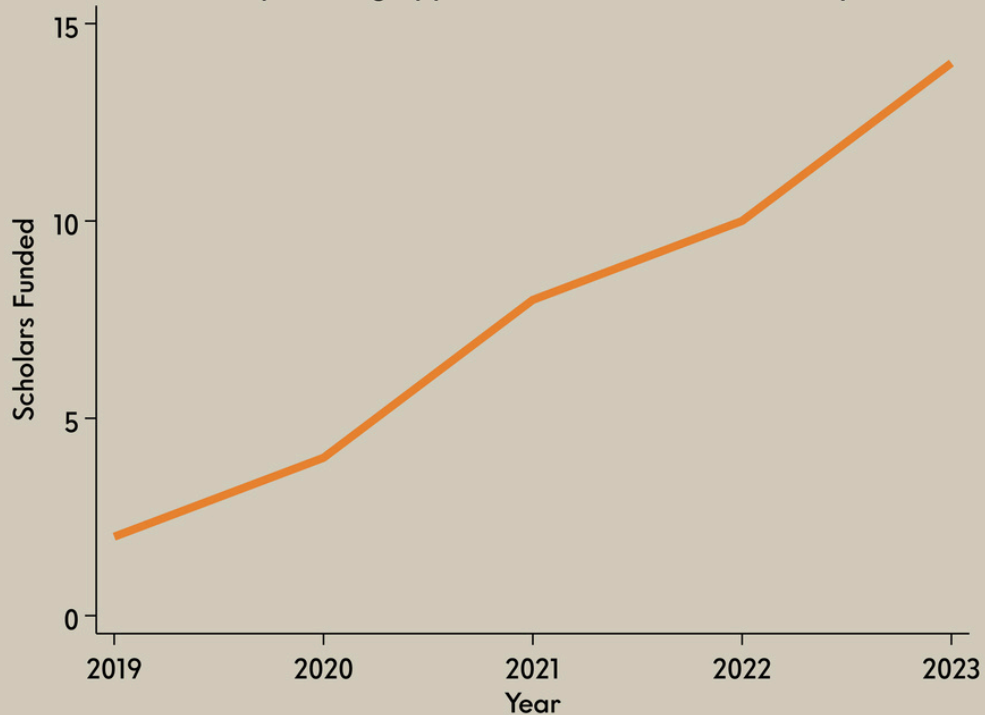
Appendix

Financial Report

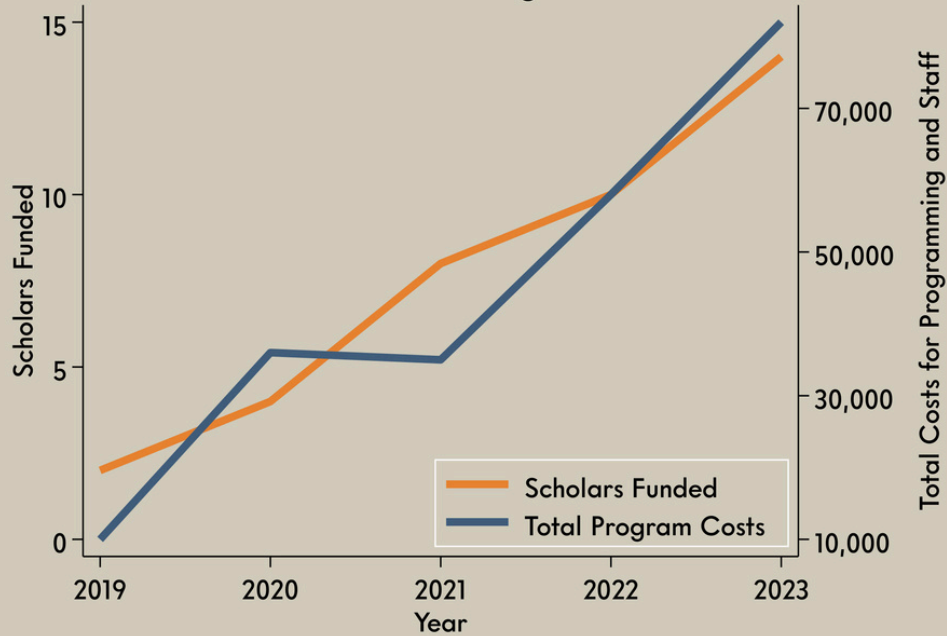
We made \$65,000 in direct awards to scholars this year--more than ever before.



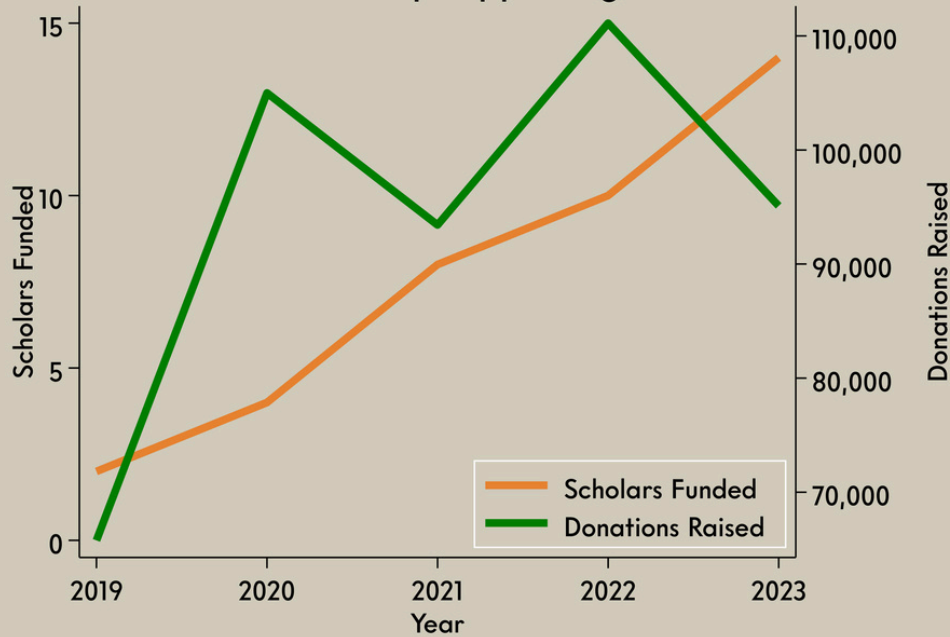
We are now providing opportunities for 4 times as many scholars.



Supporting more scholars means bringing on staff as well as increasing awards.



Fundraising has been steady, but we need to increase our raise to keep supporting more scholars.



Special Thanks to Co-Lab Research for providing the above data visualizations



**Complete Financial Report available upon request*

Meet the Team



Bre Pressey
Executive Director

Daughter of Dr. Pressey and co-founder of SSI. Bre leads all operations at Southern Scholars and works 1-on-1 with Scholars as a program Coach.



Snow Pressey
Program Coordinator

Daughter of Dr. Pressey and co-founder of SSI. Snow manages systems and resources, ensuring every member of the Southern Scholars family is granted the materials needed for Scholar Success.



Kris Robinson
Deputy Director

Kris offers his expertise in higher education to design and facilitate Scholar programming and co-leads key operations at SSI. He also works 1-on-1 with Scholars as a Coach.



Alyssa Furline
Scholar Success & Comms

Alyssa applies her Communications background to manage outreach for SSI via social media and email. She aids in the design and facilitation of programming.

Meet the Board



Robbie Pressey
(Founding) Chairman

Robbie Pressey is the husband of the Late Dr. Doretha Pressey, Southern Scholars Initiative's namesake. He is a Vice President of Global Procurement at Regeneron Pharmaceuticals. He is also an Ordained Elder in The Church of God In Christ. Robbie worked to establish the Dr. Doretha Pressey Southern Scholars Initiative along with his daughters Bre and Snow.

Berdett Coleman is a lifelong learner with a passion for education. She has committed her career and talents to educating students with emotional disabilities - a community that is consistently underserved. She currently leads as Secondary Program Specialist for Social Emotional Special Education Supports at Montgomery County Maryland Public Schools.



Berdett Coleman
(Founding) Secretary



Barbara Coleman
Advisory Member

Barbara Coleman is a beloved sister of Dr. Pressey and Aunt to co-founders Bre and Snow Pressey. Barbara is a welcoming and caring presence to all who know her. She currently serves as the Program Director for all programs (Early Childcare , Adult Day & Adult Education) at Mercy Neighborhood Ministries where she facilitates impactful events and activities for participating youth and seniors.

Meet the Board



Sister Ann Provost
Founding Member

Sister Ann Provost brings her 40 years of teaching experience towards seeking ways and establishing programs that assist people in underserved areas to receive services and transforming opportunities through education. She currently serves as Executive Director of Mercy Neighborhood Ministries of Philadelphia, Inc.

Dr. Thelma F. Sojourner is a firm believer that students can learn and that academic achievement, positive employee support, commitment and engagement only lead to long-term confidence and maintenance of success. In her position of Superintendent of Bamberg School District Two, she has led a variety of initiatives including the securing of a \$38 million bond referendum to build a Pre-K through 5th grade school and renovate the current middle and high schools.



Thelma Sojourner
Founding Member



Kenneth Baldwin
Member

Kenneth Baldwin leads a career in cross functional collaboration delivering improved results for industry leading organizations. He carries extensive experience in coaching and leading Best-in-Class Center of Excellence and supply chain teams. Baldwin currently serves as the Executive Director of Global Procurement's Center of Excellence and Operations at Regeneron Pharmaceuticals.

Meet the Board



Chotsani West
Member

Dr. Chotsani Williams West has a career spanning over 20 years in youth and professional development, mentoring leadership, school reform, and social services through a diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism lens, with an emphasis on Implicit Bias and Microaggressions. She currently serves as the Assistant Vice President of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging for Adelphi University, as well as an Adjunct Professor.

Dr. Devin Thornburg has been involved in school reform and teacher education for three decades, writing about teacher-student relationships and roles in diverse settings. He currently works as a Professor of Education at Adelphi University, teaching courses in cognition, culture and learning, social justice, and human rights.



Devin Thornburg
Founding Member



Ellen Wolaner
Member

Ellen Wolaner is a mission-driven finance executive with decades of experience across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, including leading finance and operations at Wallin Education Partners. She sees college education as a key to leveling the playing field for low income students of color, their families, and their communities.

Meet the Board



Dave Crenshaw
Member

David A. Crenshaw joined Regeneron in 2018 and serves as senior vice president, associate general counsel. Mr. Crenshaw is the law department's lead attorney for the IOPS organization, and also oversees the company's global privacy and export controls/trade regulation groups. He holds a B.A. from Colgate University and a J.D. from Syracuse University College of Law. David resigned from our board earlier this year but remains a steadfast supporter of our work.

Dr. Deneathra Monique Butler is a native of Orangeburg, South Carolina. She has worked in the educational arena for twenty-four years. Most recently, she finished her fifth year as a middle/high school principal in rural South Carolina. Dr. Butler holds a Doctorate of Education degree in Educational Leadership.



Deneathra Butler
Member



L.V. Plummer
Member

L.V. Plummer is driven to use the skills and knowledge that he has acquired through his 11 years of intensive study and experience in Finance to help clients attain financial prosperity for themselves, their families, and future generations. He holds a CFP® Certification as a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ Practitioner for his very own Plummer Wealth Strategists firm.



SOUTHERN
SCHOLARS
INITIATIVE

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Scholars Today!