



CATALYZING  
UNTAPPED HUMAN  
POTENTIAL.



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IMPACT REPORT  
2020

Imagine Scholar is founded on the belief that there is an equal distribution of human potential around the world.

Our mission is to find and cultivate a network of truly extraordinary young people and help them positively impact their communities, companies, and the country.

# LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

**Students don't come to Imagine Scholar, they are Imagine Scholars.**

Reflecting on 2020, I find myself with a deep sense of gratitude for what Imagine Scholar really means and what it has become. Firstly, a sincere thank you to our Board of Directors, donors and advocates. This year has been incredibly difficult – difficult for big organizations, small nonprofits like us, and individuals on a profoundly personal level. Nearly every member of our network stayed with us this year and found new ways to step up and support extended programming, even if it involved some experimentation.

Thank you to our staff, who continue to think out of the box and design truly excellent educational experiences. I use the word experiences intentionally, as this year proved we don't need four walls, laptops, classes with start and end times, or any conventional vestiges of "school" for the essence of our program to be felt.

Our team went the extra mile to ensure we delivered - not just top-notch education under undeniably difficult circumstances but also essentials that kept families in





our community safe. PPE drop-offs, food deliveries, guidance on navigating misinformation. 2020 has been a year where we were stretched to do more than our mission statement, and our team took ambiguity in stride.

Most importantly, thank you to our students who kept the Imagine Scholar spirit of quirkiness, curiosity, kindness, and thoughtful leadership alive no matter what. A community is only as great as every member decides to make it, and this year, our student body exhibited a level of dedication and positivity far beyond their years. 2020 had the guard rails come off and necessitated that students adapt and live our organizational mantra of autodidactic learning — and they did. Scholars showed up for the organization, for their families, and for themselves.

I'm grateful to be a part of our community and see this year as an affirmation that the world needs the kind of positivity and hope that emanates from our space more than ever. I am looking forward to 2021 and our continued forward momentum.

**COREY JOHNSON**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & FOUNDER**

A young woman with dark skin and short hair is laughing heartily, her head tilted back and eyes closed. She is wearing a white tank top with a black graphic of a guitar and stars. The background shows a classroom with several rows of desks and chairs, some with backpacks on them.

# WHAT IS IMAGINE SCHOLAR



# OUR MODEL

Imagine Scholar has a 16-year life cycle, consisting of 4 programmatic phases that align with young people's stages of life. Our model pushes the boundaries of education, positioning it as a tool not to pursue status, but as an ongoing journey and commitment to curiosity, betterment, and self-actualization.

# 1.

The first phase of Imagine Scholar is an intensive, in-person (during non-COVID times), 25+ hour per week commitment. Scholars enter our program based on their tenacity and eagerness to better themselves and their communities. Scholars engage with thinking tools, practical exercises, and personal mentors during the high school program intending to develop a healthy and happy relationship with themselves.

— **Ages 14 to 17**

## PHASE: HIGH SCHOOL

## 2.

University can be a stressful time for young people. Imagine Scholar provides a personalized support infrastructure for students to help them drive in an academic direction they're passionate about and find equilibrium between working hard and maintaining a sense of emotional equanimity towards the inevitable stresses of change.

— **Ages 18 to 21**



**PHASE:  
UNIVERSITY**

# 3.

The young professional program helps Scholars navigate the transition from study into the workplace. The purpose of this phase is to push past the focus on employment alone, and to encourage young people to stay positive, stay vibrant, and actively seek ways to keep the Imagine Scholar spirit alive in the "real world."

— **Ages 22 to 25**



**PHASE:  
YOUNG  
PROFESSIONAL**

# 4.

As Scholars near the end of their 20s, our focus shifts from internal progress to external impact. Impact can take shape in numerous ways; however, the fourth phase of the program is dedicated to helping young adults identify and make a dent in a challenge they are interested in solving.

— **Ages 26 to 30**



PHASE:  
IMPACT

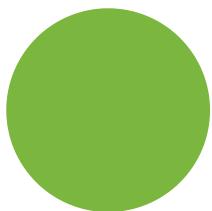
# AFTER IMAGINE SCHOLAR

Imagine Scholar has reached a tipping point where more members of our Scholar network are alumni of the high school program than not. In this exciting stage of development, we have begun to map various pathways for engagement with our organizational ethos after Imagine Scholar.



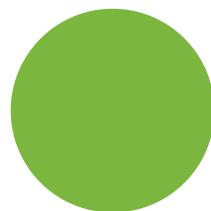
# — IMAGINE SCHOLAR ECOSYSTEM —

## PATHWAYS TO ENGAGEMENT



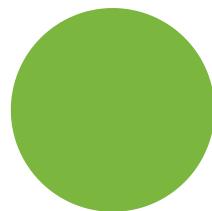
### FUTURE STAFF

An essential component to our sustainability model is turning over key staff positions (in addition to Board of Director posts) to alumni of our program, ensuring that we are progressing local leadership.



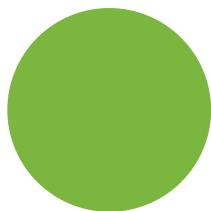
### COMMUNITY LEADERS

Resilient communities are built by diverse people. Scholars are civically engaged and proactive about making their communities happier, healthier places to live. Our alumni engage in local, grassroots initiatives.



### PROJECT CREATORS

Scholars have a bias toward action. Many of our alumni become the entrepreneurs, innovators, and job creators that breathe new life into communities. Their projects are often impact-driven.



### PROJECT SUSTAINERS

A business or social impact project is only as strong as its people. Scholars tap into one another's networks and support each other's projects, ensuring their success and sustainability over time.

# IMAGINE IMPACT



# WHAT IS IMAGINE IMPACT?

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Our goal is for every student to have the opportunity to reach their innate potential and to create an impactful life.

Imagine Impact is a sister program to Imagine Scholar, launched in 2019, that allows us to create a scalable, open-source model to catalyze untapped youth potential in low-income communities. Imagine Impact borrows the core program's ethos and curricula, but distills it into its core elements with a lighter and more flexible workload that is accessible to a greater number of students.

**78**

**Students served  
since inception**

**8**

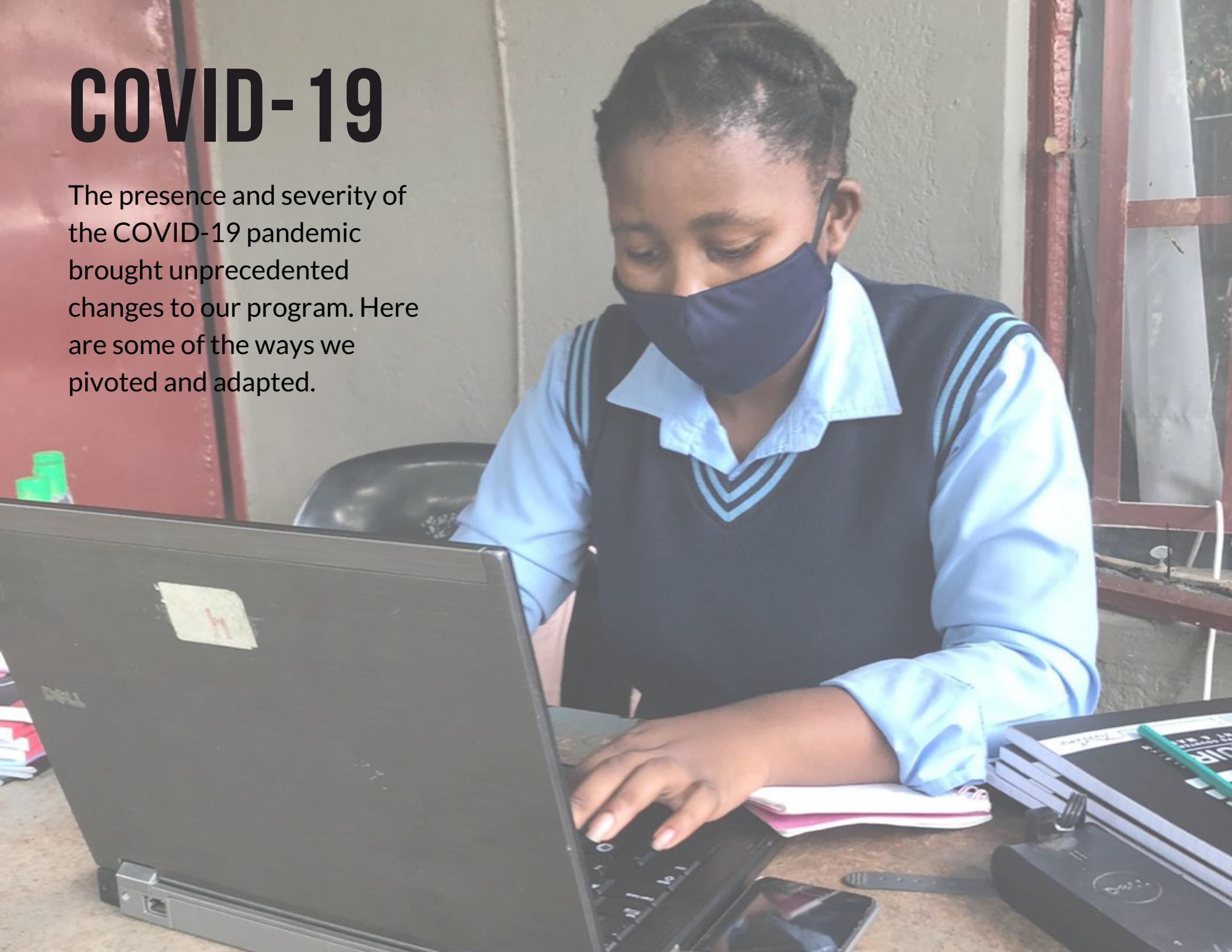
**Hours attended  
per week**

**98**

**Percent  
retention rate**

# COVID-19

The presence and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented changes to our program. Here are some of the ways we pivoted and adapted.



# CURRICULUM

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Imagine Scholar's in-person programming was promptly transferred to digital programming hosted via WhatsApp due to the lack of accessible wifi and personal laptops available to students at home.

Students engaged in various classes via their mobile device, engaged in digital discussions via messaging and voice notes, led advocacy groups and attended weekly personal check-in calls with a staff facilitator.

Imagine Scholar supplied data bundles to all students and devices (including Kindles) where necessary.



# COMMUNITY

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Our community was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Imagine Scholar stepped up beyond our normal programming to provide PPE and food parcels to local families. Scholars enacted a COVID-19 Advocacy group to help stop the spread of fake news among their peers and social circles.



# BONGANE'S EXPERIENCE

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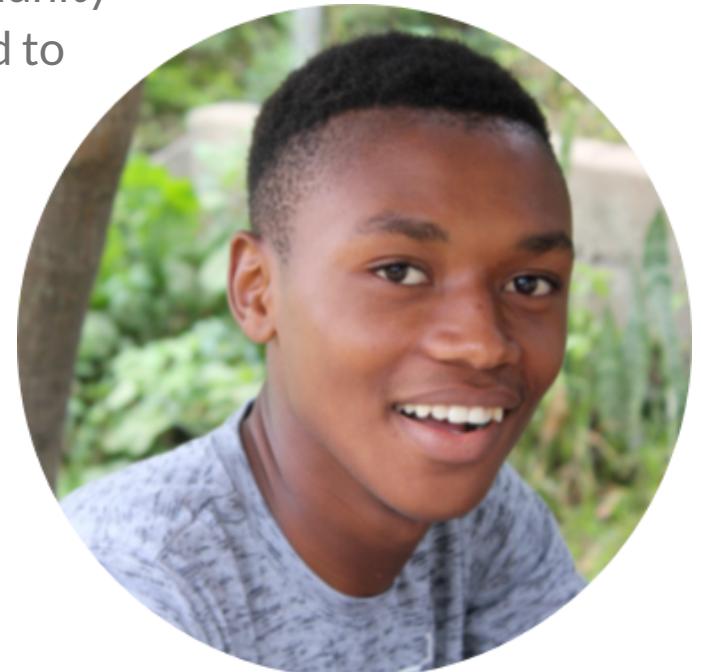
"At the beginning of the year I wasn't expecting 2020 to turn out the way that it did and I was definitely not prepared for any of it. Like most people I was confused and afraid, mostly because of the fake information that was going around. But at IS, before we closed the campus, we had a courageous conversation about Covid-19, about how to verify what's true and what's not and that made me feel a lot better because I was now aware of what was going on. But that was only the beginning. IS also provided me with academic support, helped me stay positive and made sure that my family and I stayed safe and healthy. Since school was closed and we were on lockdown there was really no other way to study except by ourselves at home. IS provided me with the necessary resources and tools I needed to make sure that I kept up with my studies. I had academic coaching from John, exam books, content videos on my kindle, planning systems to help stay accountable and support from peers through the WhatsApp online classes that we had.

There was really no way of getting bored because IS provided me with a lot of books in my kindle. I was a member of two poetry WhatsApp groups, a reading group and a journaling group. I also had my scholar hive to check on me and make sure that I was doing fine...

...IS made sure that I stayed safe by providing me with healthy tips, things I should and shouldn't do, things like wearing masks, exercising and doing mindfulness. 2020 was a difficult year but with IS by my side it was a lot more manageable.

In 2020 I grew in being autodidactic, since I had to do a lot of independent learning. Through the learning and planning systems from IS I was able to slowly improve and have more meaningful learning. One tool that helped me improve was one where I recorded all my learning sessions, subjects I studied per week and the strategies I used. This data was very useful because at the end of the month I could see if I have been studying enough or not. I also saw what I needed to change and what to do more of. By the end of 2020 I was a more independent learner than I was in 2019. I also developed the skill to do portraiture. I've always wanted to draw and during one of our IS community meet ups, we talked about the things we've always wanted to do but never had the chance or given ourselves time to do them and then we made a plan to finally do those things. And just like that I started drawing and I actually enjoyed it more than I thought I would. Drawing is now an activity that helps me relax and just feel more alive. So I'm grateful that I got the chance to develop it."

**BONGANE, GRADE 11**



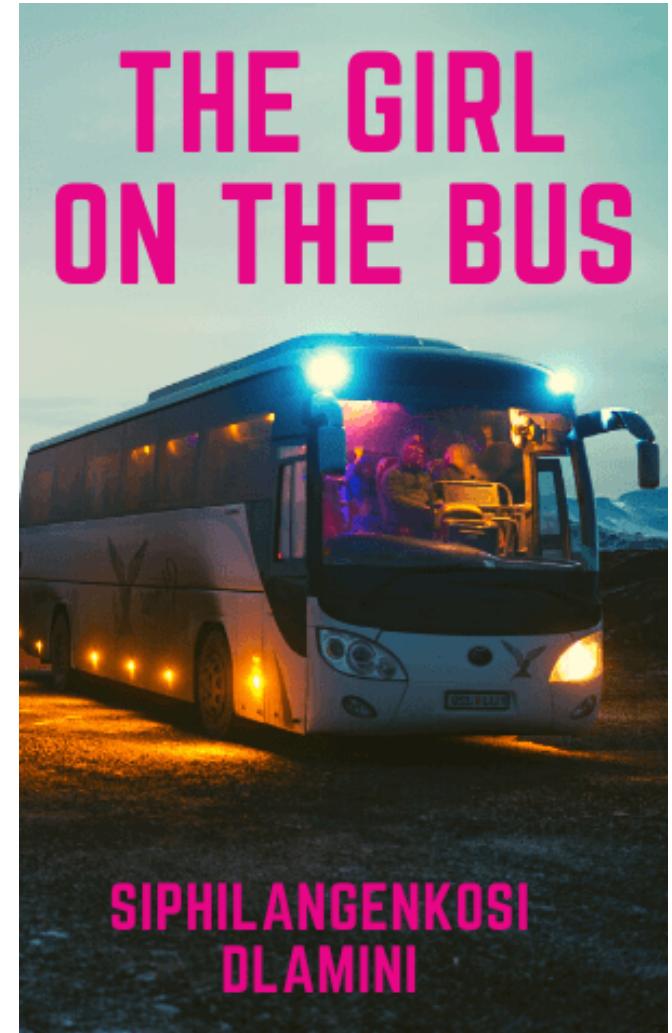
# STUDENT PROJECTS DURING LOCKDOWN

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Scholars kept busy during the lockdown, finding new and innovative ways to drive their passions forward. Here are a few examples of student projects:

Siphila kept busy during quarantine by putting pen to paper on his first published novel! His new book, "The Girl on the Bus" was published by the FunDza Literacy Trust and is available online for anyone to read.

Phila built an app to help students at his campus social distance while doing their laundry! The app allows students to book time slots on their smartphones, minimizing the number of people in the washroom at any given time.



# STUDENT PROJECTS DURING LOCKDOWN

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With support and funding from the International Support Network for African Development, Imagine Scholar's Green Team launched a project to propagate spekboom plants, which are highly effective at absorbing carbon and distribute them to community members.

Sibahle won first prize at the AVBOB Poetry Gala for the SiSwati language! You can watch him receive the prize on the AVBOB awards live stream at 1hr and 6min. His poem is now published in a poetry book entitled "I Wish I'd Said... (Vol.3)".



# AWARDS



For the second consecutive year, Imagine Scholar was awarded by the Wharton-QS Reimagine Education Conference & Awards. In 2020, we were recognized for pedagogical innovation in African and the K12 education category:

"This project has achieved a world-class standard in educational innovation, having been chosen as one of the leading applications from a cohort of 1500. The awarded application achieved outstanding levels of scalability, innovation, and efficacy."

# TESTIMONIALS

A photograph of three young boys of African descent, all wearing face masks. The boy on the left wears a black mask and a maroon hoodie. The boy in the center wears a black mask and a light grey zip-up hoodie. The boy on the right wears a blue mask and a red shirt, and has glasses. They are standing in front of a black wrought-iron gate with a stone building and greenery in the background.



**FISOKUHLE**  
Grade 10 Scholar

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Imagine Scholar really supported me in 2020 through phone calls and conversations with my facilitators. I got support on academics and creating better systems to achieve my goals. Imagine Scholar helped me to develop accountability, autonomy and self confidence.

I started to believe more in myself and most days didn't pass by without me studying. I was applying the tools and advice given to me. I learned that even though I get all the tools to keep me accountable, I am the one to make the choice to use them. Now I'm more committed to my growth, committed to accountability and committed to being great!





**PRECIOUS**  
Grade 9 Scholar

“Imagine Scholar supported me a lot when it came to discovering more about myself. The program helped me develop skills in accountability, positivity, and mindfulness.

I learned to be accountable through the online programming. I got to learn the importance of being able to plan more and to grow through being responsible and having to learn to submit tasks on time and to join discussions. I got to learn how to maintain a positive mindset and the importance of having a positive mindset. I learned how you shouldn't always focus on the negative and sharing gratitude helps in being able to view a positive moment from any negative thoughts.

# SCHOLARS IN UNIVERSITY

Imagine Scholar graduates have attended well established tertiary education institutions around the world. To follow is a list of our current alumni and where they are completing their university studies.



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Portia - University of Pretoria, South Africa  
Victoria - Universidad de Ciencias Medicas en Cienfuegos, Cuba  
Norman - University of Pretoria, South Africa  
Mandisa - American University of Beirut, Lebanon  
Tandzile - United States International University, Kenya  
Ncamiso - University of Johannesburg, South Africa  
Nosizo - Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa  
Sandiso - Africa University, Zimbabwe  
Enky - Westminster College, USA  
Noncedo - United States International University, Kenya  
Gladys - UNISA, South Africa  
Siphila - University of Free State, South Africa  
Xoliswa - University of Venda, South Africa  
Jeanet - University of Pretoria, South Africa  
Nomthandazo - University of Pretoria, South Africa  
Florence - Africa University, Zimbabwe  
Loveness - Africa University, Zimbabwe  
Constance - African Leadership University, Rwanda  
Siphiwokule - University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa  
Rodger - College of Idaho, USA  
Justice - Skidmore College, USA  
Nomthandazo - University of Pretoria, South Africa  
Florence - Africa University, Zimbabwe  
Loveness - Africa University, Zimbabwe  
Constance - African Leadership University, Rwanda  
Siphiwokule - University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa  
Rodger - College of Idaho, USA

Muzi - African Leadership University, Mauritius  
Allan - University of Pretoria, South Africa  
Andile - University of Western Cape, South Africa  
Ayanda - University of Johannesburg, South Africa  
Buyelani - University of Cape Town, South Africa  
Joselinah - University of Pretoria, South Africa  
Lindelwa - UNISA, South Africa  
Nokwanda - University of Western Cape, South Africa  
Nonkululeko - University of Witwatersrand, South Africa  
Hloniphile - United States International University, Kenya  
Sanelisiwe - University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa  
Sphiwe - University of Pretoria, South Africa  
Phila - Case Western Reserve University, USA  
Carol - United States International University, Kenya  
Chawe - Westminster College, USA  
Nomcebo - University of Western Cape, South Africa  
Nosipho - United States International University, Kenya  
Shadrack - University of Free State, South Africa  
Glen - Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, South Africa  
Samkeliso - United States International University, Kenya  
Wendy - University of Cape Town, South Africa  
Luyanda - University of Cape Town, South Africa  
Lizzy - University of Western Cape, South Africa  
Adronica - University of Western Cape, South Africa  
Angel - University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa  
Given - St. Olaf College, USA

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A close-up photograph of a young woman with short hair, wearing a grey baseball cap and a bright pink zip-up top. She is smiling warmly at the camera. The background is filled with large, green banana leaves, suggesting a tropical or agricultural setting.

# GROWTH & FINANCIALS

# UNDERSTANDING OUR FINANCIALS

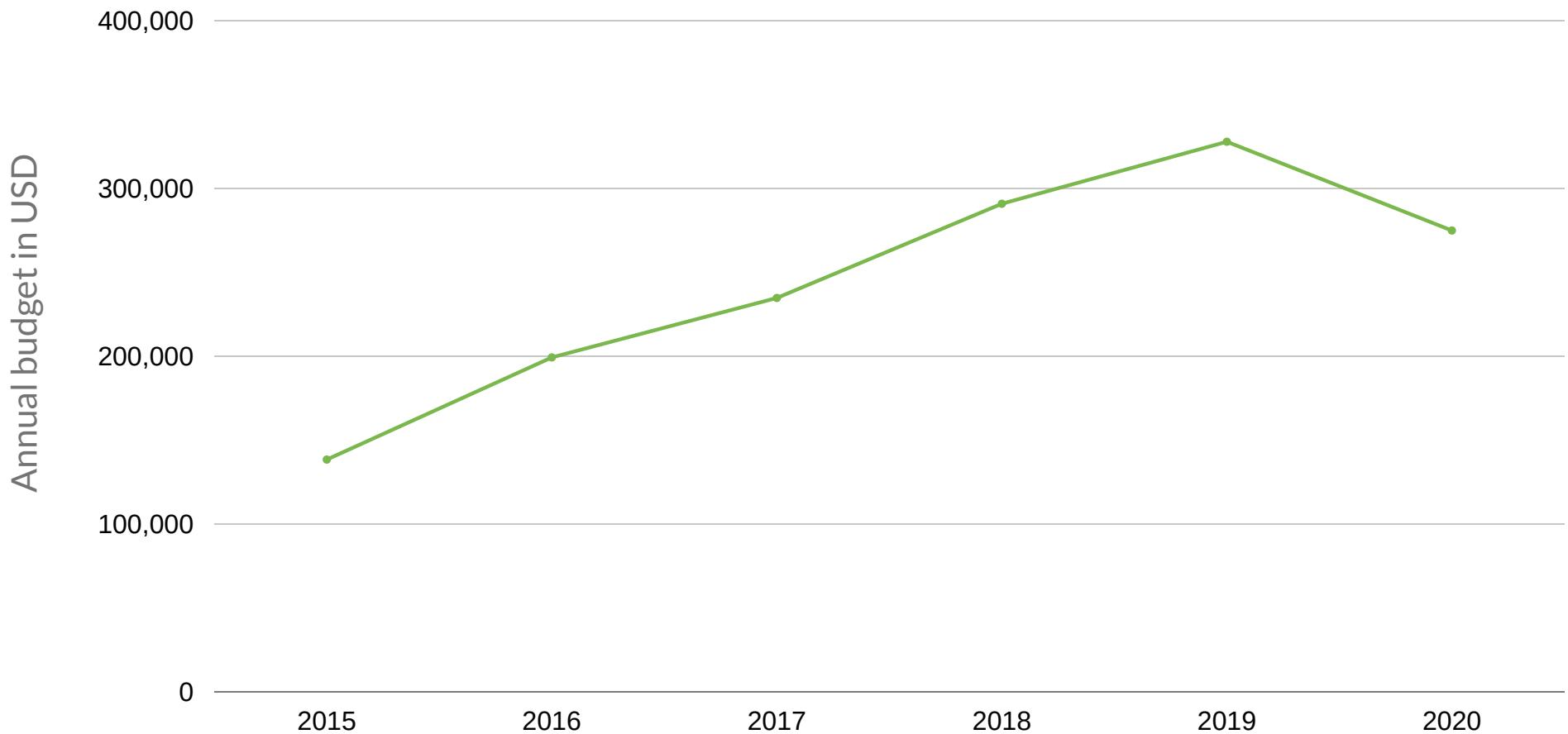
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In 2020, our annual operating budget dropped by 16%. This drop in budget was due to a reduction in infrastructure-related costs (i.e., electricity, water, and maintenance) as we transitioned to a digital curriculum during the pandemic. Despite the disruption of in-person classes, we continued to deliver full programming online and supported our students, their families, and our wider community in new and innovative ways.

Imagine Scholar strives to use monetary resources thoughtfully, and thus, our budget changes according to the evolving needs of our students. Even in a context of scarce resources, we seek to create the highest amount of value by employing and investing in exceptional staff. Great people are our most significant "expense" because they provide the most significant return on investment. Undoubtedly, our staff (none of which lost their jobs during the pandemic) enabled us to navigate the uncertainties of 2020 gracefully and come out stronger on the other side.

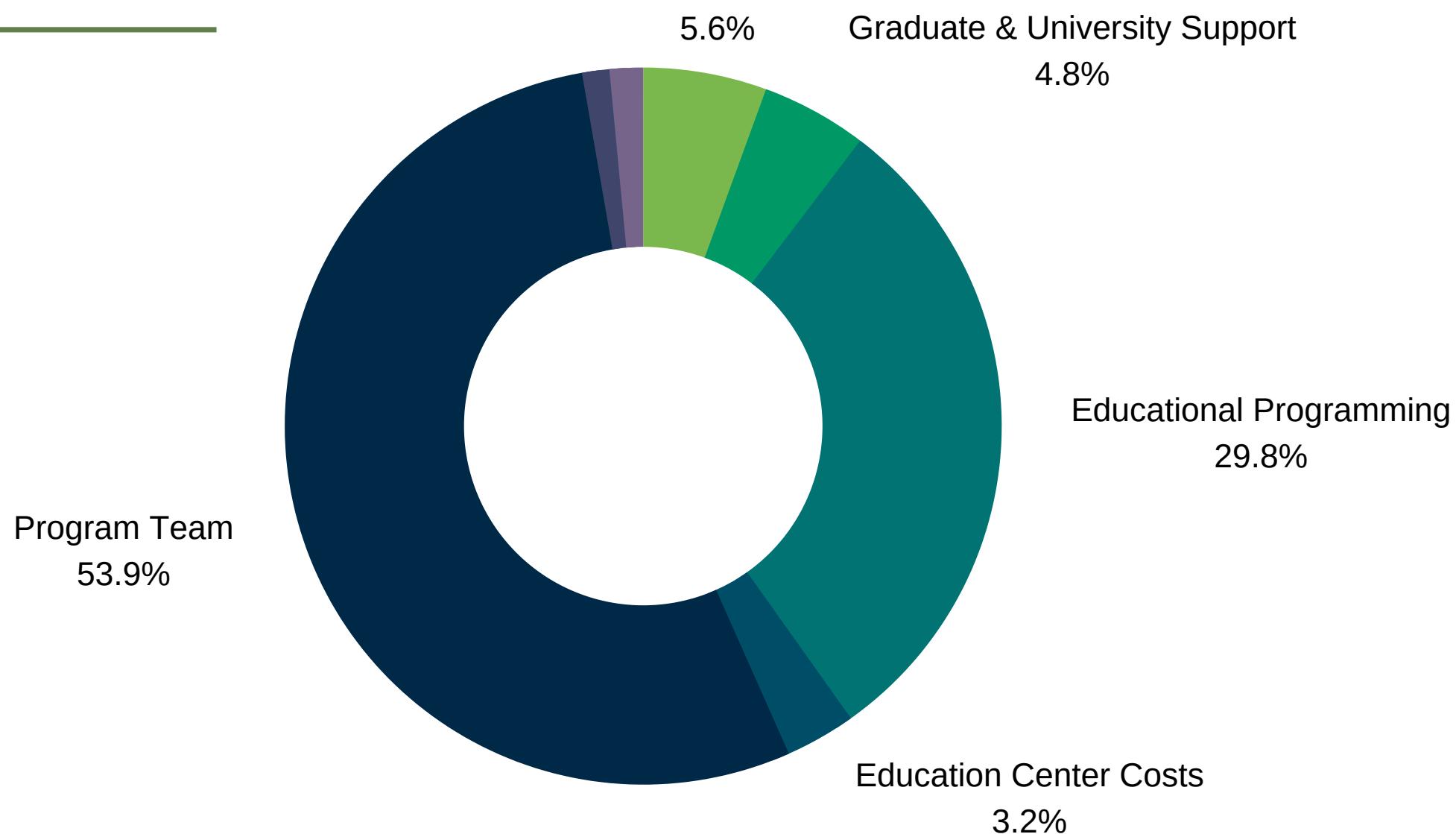
We are deeply grateful to our donors who understand the importance of people in fostering powerful educational experiences.

# ANNUAL BUDGET HISTORY

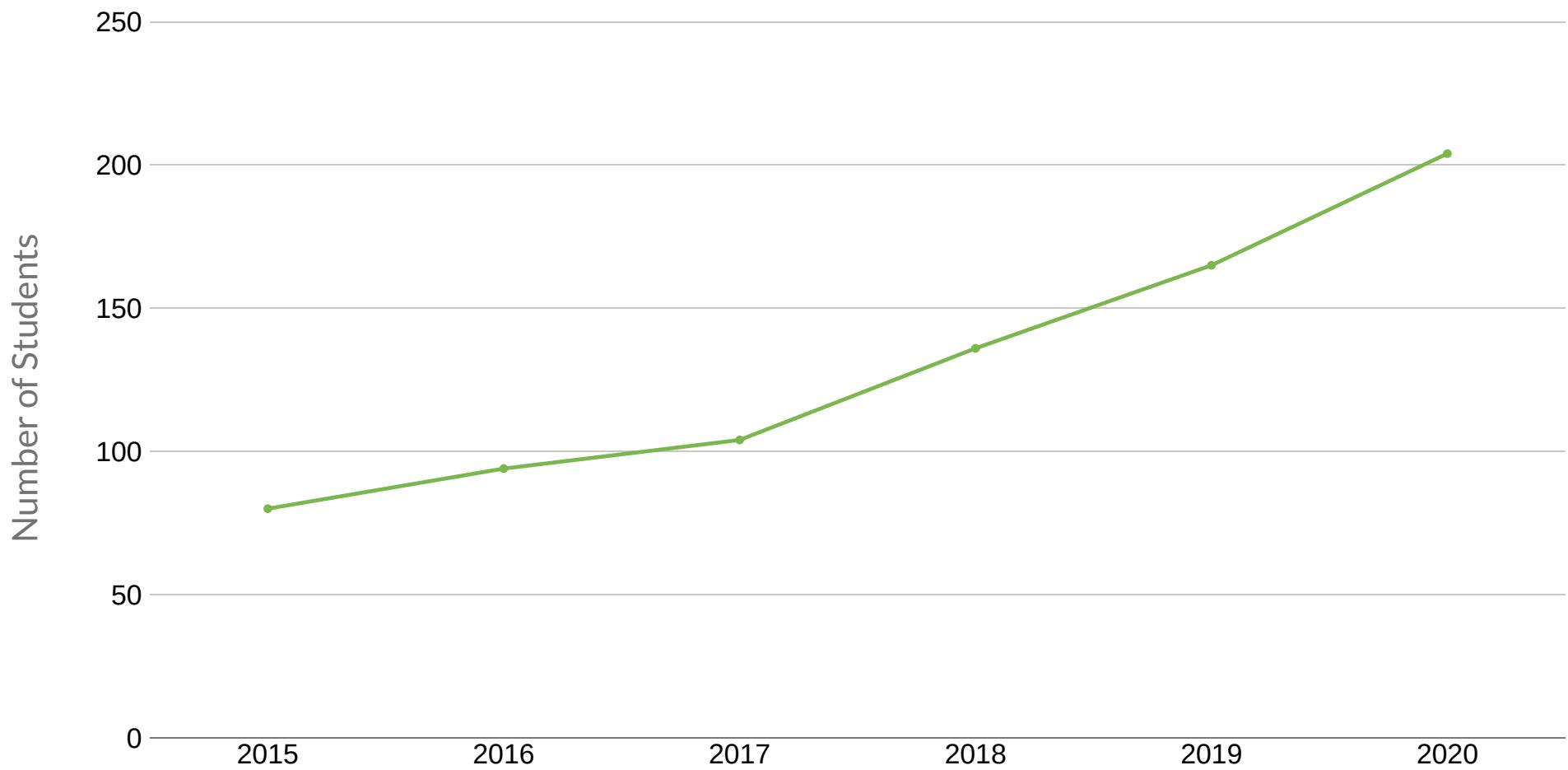


# DONATION TRANSPARENCY

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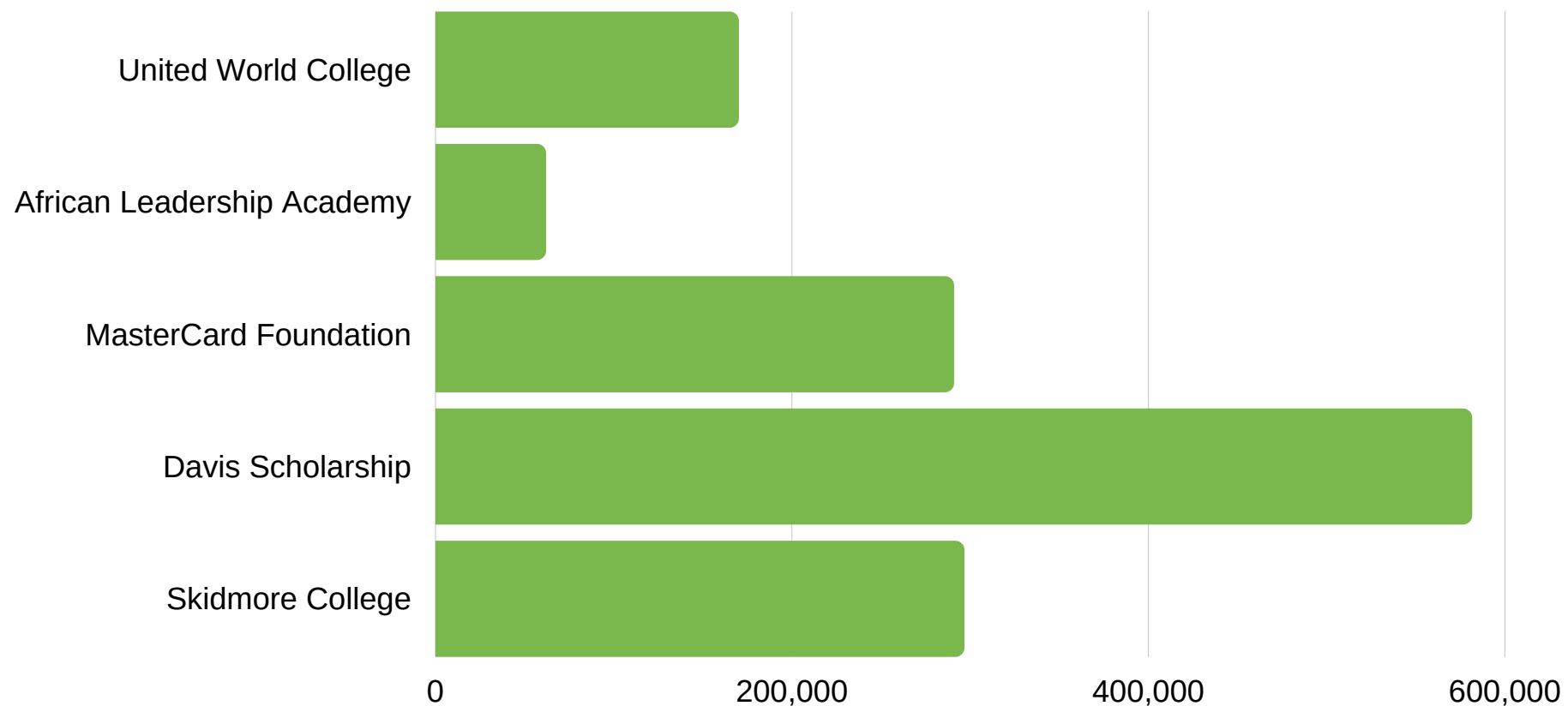


# ANNUAL STUDENTS SERVED



# INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS

Last year, Scholars received a total of \$1,400,450 in academic scholarships. While we don't consider scholarship awards as representative of the overarching value we provide to students, this is a significant metric when considering the return on investment of donations. In 2020, donors saw over a 4x return in monetary value created for higher education opportunities.





**PARESH SONI**  
Board Member

The year 2020 was a difficult one for many organizations. Despite that, Imagine Scholar successfully kept our scholars engaged and productive through these trying times. The core program that teaches scholars important skills like how to learn, critical thinking, basic values, teamwork, and the spirit of being part of the community and giving back to it – all the skills that are needed to thrive in the modern world – are even more critical during and following a global pandemic. The agility of the staff and scholars to stay true to the mission of catalyzing untapped human potential and developing well-rounded young leaders hugely impressed me.

### **For development & partnership queries**

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