

# Top Notch Scholars

**FOUNDED:** 2015

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION BUDGET:** \$840,450

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Once a major producer of textiles and a draw for generations of immigrants, Lawrence had many employment opportunities for its residents. As manufacturing industry moved out, Lawrence's economy was devastated.

Today Lawrence has high unemployment (7.7%) and the lowest high school graduation rate in the state (79%). Lawrence residents face housing and food insecurity, mental health issues, and language barriers.

However, these statistics alone do not tell the full story of present-day Lawrence. Its residents, especially young people, are resilient and motivated.

Top Notch Scholars (TNS) surrounds students (scholars) age 14 to 19 years old with a caring and supportive community that focuses on helping them develop the confidence and knowledge to pursue their passions by providing:

- Personal Development
- Educational Planning
- Connections to mentors and internships

TNS maps out individual educational plans with students and offers high schoolers placement in healthcare, technology, and business internships. For those interested in other fields, TNS finds internships in students' specific interest area.

## Two-Year Goals

- Increase the number of high school program participants from 150 to 300
- Expand the number of academies offered from 5 to 6
- Increase the level of individual giving by 20%
- Increase the number of leadership conferences from 1 to 4
- Strengthen the data collection and outcomes measurement systems

## Investment Opportunity

Top Notch Scholars provides the support and experience for students to build the social capital that is vital to successfully access the working world. Over the next two years it seeks \$1.8M to double the number of high school students involved with its leadership training, educational planning, and career exploration from 150 to 300 annually. TNS will also expand the number of training and internship academies from 5 to 6 and increase the number of leadership and career conferences from one to four.

## Ways to Invest

- Provide an internship opportunity for a scholar in your workplace
- Host a workplace tour for a group of scholars
- Sponsor college visits for scholars (\$250 per student)
- Support the establishment of a new academy in real estate & property management
- Host a leadership conference at your workplace

## Top Notch Scholars Model



### Personal Development Shapes Positive Future

Based in a historic Lawrence mill building, TNS offers five academies (10- to 15- week modules) that allow students to go deeper into setting goals and understanding careers. TNS is flexible to fit various schedules, and students can participate in any or all academies, including:

**Leadership Academy:** The cornerstone of the TNS experience, it focuses on developing student confidence and emotional independence to set and achieve educational, career, and life goals. Youth explore their interests, identify their priorities, and intentionally prepare to accomplish them. They have access to 1:1 mentoring and engage in community service, personal/professional development workshops, and specialized skills training. TNS also conducts a series of motivational speaking conferences.

**College & Career Pathways Academy:** Scholars map out an educational plan to launch their career. They learn how to get scholarships, understand financial aid, and how to minimize their debt. Students go on college tours,

learn about trade schools and hear from many Lawrence-based business owners to get a full understanding of educational options post high school.

In addition to the structured academies, TNS engages scholars in regular community-building activities. They go on whitewater rafting trips, attend concerts and community fairs, hike in the White Mountains, and perform regular community services, including food drives and serving meals in shelters. The goal is to expose scholars to new experiences and to knit together a network of individuals who will be able to support each other in the years to come.



## Training and Internships to Build Meaningful Careers

TNS offers three career-focused trainings and internships.

**Healthcare Internship Academy:** Lawrence General Hospital partners with TNS providing fifteen-week internships for scholars. Scholars intern in various departments, including the emergency room, pediatrics, maternity, and nutrition. They receive mentorship from doctors, nurses, and other hospital professionals.

**Entrepreneurship Academy:** TNS scholars learn how to manage a water business, Top Notch Water. Scholars conduct cold calls to businesses, manage accounts, and sell TNS branded natural spring water at events. TNS supplies its product to over twenty restaurants and businesses. All profits go directly to creating student scholarships. Last year TNS raised over \$60,000.

**Coding & Technology Academy:** TNS partnered with Code Wiz to embed “Scratch” (developed by the MIT Media Lab) within the Academy. The experience promotes computational thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving. This academy is ever-evolving and seeks to lay a foundation for future learning and jobs in cutting-edge technology.

*“Top Notch Scholars has become my special place. The TNS crew inspire and motivate me to be the best version of myself.”*

— Lesley Hernandez, Top Notch Scholar

## Leadership & Governance

Raised in Lawrence, Joanna de Peña, Founder & CEO, and Jenny Alvarez, Vice President, worked tirelessly to develop Top Notch out of needs they saw in their community to build more business connections and opportunity for young people. Joanna earned a bachelor’s degree in business management at Lasell University and master’s in education at Merrimack College. She oversees the overall strategic vision of the organization, leads academies, and guides the youth. Jenny has over twenty years of business experience and is responsible for managing relationships with community partners. Today they lead TNS with a six-person board of directors who come from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

## Financial Sustainability

TNS has grown from a two-person operation to a staff of eight with consistent support from businesses and foundations and a commitment to diversify its funding. It earned \$60K revenue in 2023 from its product sales. The Cummings Foundation made a \$1 million pledge in 2023 that will guarantee \$100,000 each year for ten years. TNS has a base of solid funding and a realistic plan for growth that will provide stability in the years to come. In the future, TNS will increase student participation and the level of involvement businesses and nonprofits have with scholars.

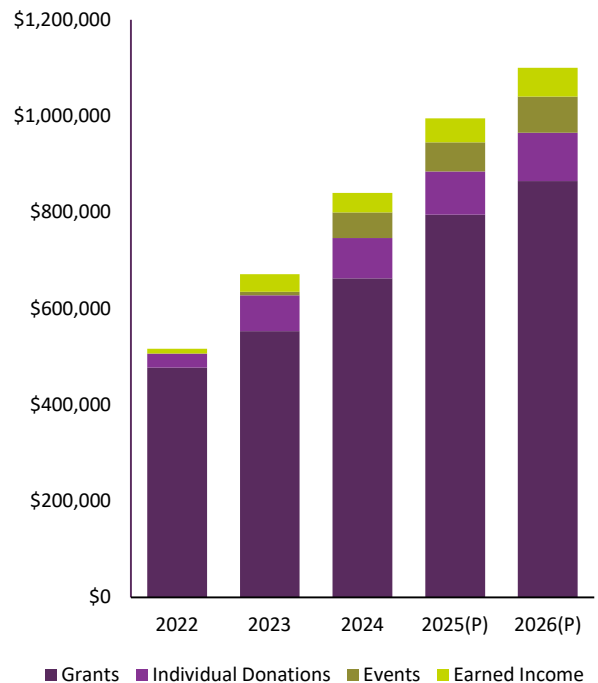
### KEY INVESTORS

- Amelia Peabody Foundation
- Cummings Foundation
- The Lenny Zakim Fund
- Rogers Family Foundation
- Stevens Foundation

### KEY PARTNERS

- Business Network International
- Lawrence General Hospital
- Lawrence Public Schools
- Merrimack College
- Greater Lawrence Family Health Center
- Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce

## Revenue by Source





## Success Story

### SAVIEL ORTIZ

Saviel's journey with Top Notch Scholars began during his sophomore year of high school, a pivotal time when he lacked structure and motivation. Through the program's guidance and support, he discovered the importance of striving for excellence. With new determination, he embraced academic challenges, realizing there were pathways to success. Engaging in leadership academies, mentorship sessions, and internships at Reading Cooperative Bank and Silverio Insurance, Saviel blossomed. He emerged as a leader, captaining his swimming team and excelling in his internships. His efforts culminated in being named a Presidential Scholar for his outstanding academic achievements. Now, on the brink of graduating from UMass Amherst, Saviel stands poised for success. With promising job offers in banking in Boston awaiting him, his transformation from a struggling student to a future leader is a testament to the transformative power of dedication and support provided by Top Notch Scholars.

## Program Performance and Organizational Health

Below is a summary of the measures that TNS will track to demonstrate progress, create accountability, incorporate lessons learned, and adjust strategy to meet goals.

	FY 2024	FY 2025(P)	FY 2026(P)
<b>Program Performance</b>			
# academy scholars	150	250	300
# of academies	5	6	6
# of leadership conferences	1	3	4
# of internship site partners	4	10	15
<b>Organizational Health/Capacity-Building</b>			
# of full-time equivalent employees	5	6	8
# of Board members	6	11	11
Funds generated by Top Notch Water for scholarships	\$60,000	\$70,000	\$100,000
Total Revenue	\$840,450	\$995,000	\$1,100,000

## Social Impact

Studies show that students who have internships during high school have higher earning power throughout their life. Low-income and first-generation young people have significantly lower internship participation rates than those of their wealthier peers. TNS fills a gap by providing mentorship, career exploration, and internships to Lawrence students in a variety of fields. TNS connects students to caring adult supervisors who become mentors and can provide job references into the future. At the same time, TNS helps to enhance workplaces, strengthening employers' supervisory and communication skills to work with a new generation of diverse employees.

Indicator	Current Numbers	2026(P)
% of scholars who report an increase in confidence and connections	NA	90%
% of scholars who have a post secondary education plan upon high school graduation	90%	95%
% of scholars who complete an internship	50%	80%
% of scholars who have knowledge of options for education with reduced debt	60%	98%
% of scholars who graduate from high school	100%	100%