

A Decade of Learning: The Power of Relationships

Building 21 Annual Report • 2022–23



NOTE: This annual report was originally published online as a microsite. This PDF version has been adapted from the web-based original. Some pages are longer than the screen size and can be viewed by scrolling down before advancing to the next page.

Dear Friends, Colleagues, Supporters, and Partners,

It is hard to believe that we are celebrating our 10th anniversary. Building 21 started as an academic project in our doctoral program at Harvard. We used this opportunity to explore ideas related to our interest in making schools work better for more students. Our original aspirations were quite modest—really limited to successful completion of an assignment and the associated learnings. Inspired by the insightful feedback and strong encouragement of our teacher at the time, Dr. Richard Elmore, we turned that small project into a few summer consulting projects. The more work we did on this, the more enthusiastic we became. Eventually, we decided to commit ourselves to trying to bring this vision to life. Two Lab Schools, dozens of partner schools, and a new workforce development initiative later, we feel like we are well on our way. We hope that Richard, who sadly passed away in 2021, would be proud of the work that he helped to shape and inspire.

Over these 10 years, we have learned a great deal. We have strived to iterate and improve everything that we do to reflect these learnings. Yet, some things have remained constant. Since our founding, we have been guided by one principle over all other: **the value and importance of relationships.**

Our earliest concept documents included the following assertion:

“Positive relationships between and among young people and adults are critical to the positive growth and development of every member of a school community.”

This feels as true to us today as it did 10 years ago. In addition, we have come to appreciate the importance of such positive, supportive, and deeply connected relationships in the health and growth of our organization.

Our hundreds of Lab School graduates, thousands of Learning Innovation Network partner school students, and a first cohort of our exciting new Launchpad program are living testaments to the power of these relationships. In the stories below, you will hopefully come to appreciate the impact of these positive connections across all of our work.

It is with a profound sense of gratitude to each of you that we mark this occasion. None of this would have been possible without the support of our donors. We are honored by the trust and faith that our students and families have placed in us. Our community partners have been integral to our work since we opened our first school in 2014. And finally, all of our accomplishments rest upon the dedication and excellence of our amazing team. Thank you to each and every one of you.

We are excited and energized about the path forward. The last year has seen tremendous growth across all of our initiatives. We remain dedicated to continuing to learn and improve while never losing sight of the founding design principle that informs all of our work: the power of relationships.

With gratitude,



Laura Shubilla & Chip Linehan
Co-CEOs and Co-Founders



Timeline: Our First Decade

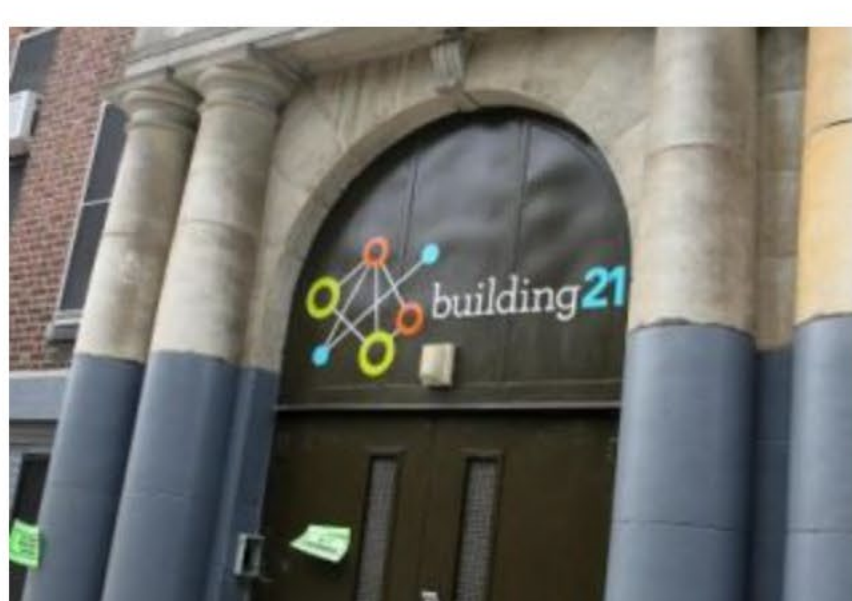
2011-2013



Building 21 concept developed

Three classmates in the Harvard Doctorate of Education Leadership Program start Building 21.

September 2014



1st Lab School Opens

Building 21 opens a new high school in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia.

September 2015



2nd Lab School Opens

Building 21 partners with the Allentown School District in Pennsylvania to open our second high school.

August 2017



3 schools in Idaho are first to join the Learning Innovation Network

High schools in the West Ada School District become the first affiliate partners in Building 21's Network.

June 8, 2018



First Graduating Class – Philadelphia

Building 21 Philadelphia high school graduates its first senior class. The graduation rate (84%) is well above the city-wide average and rises even higher (to 88%) the following year.

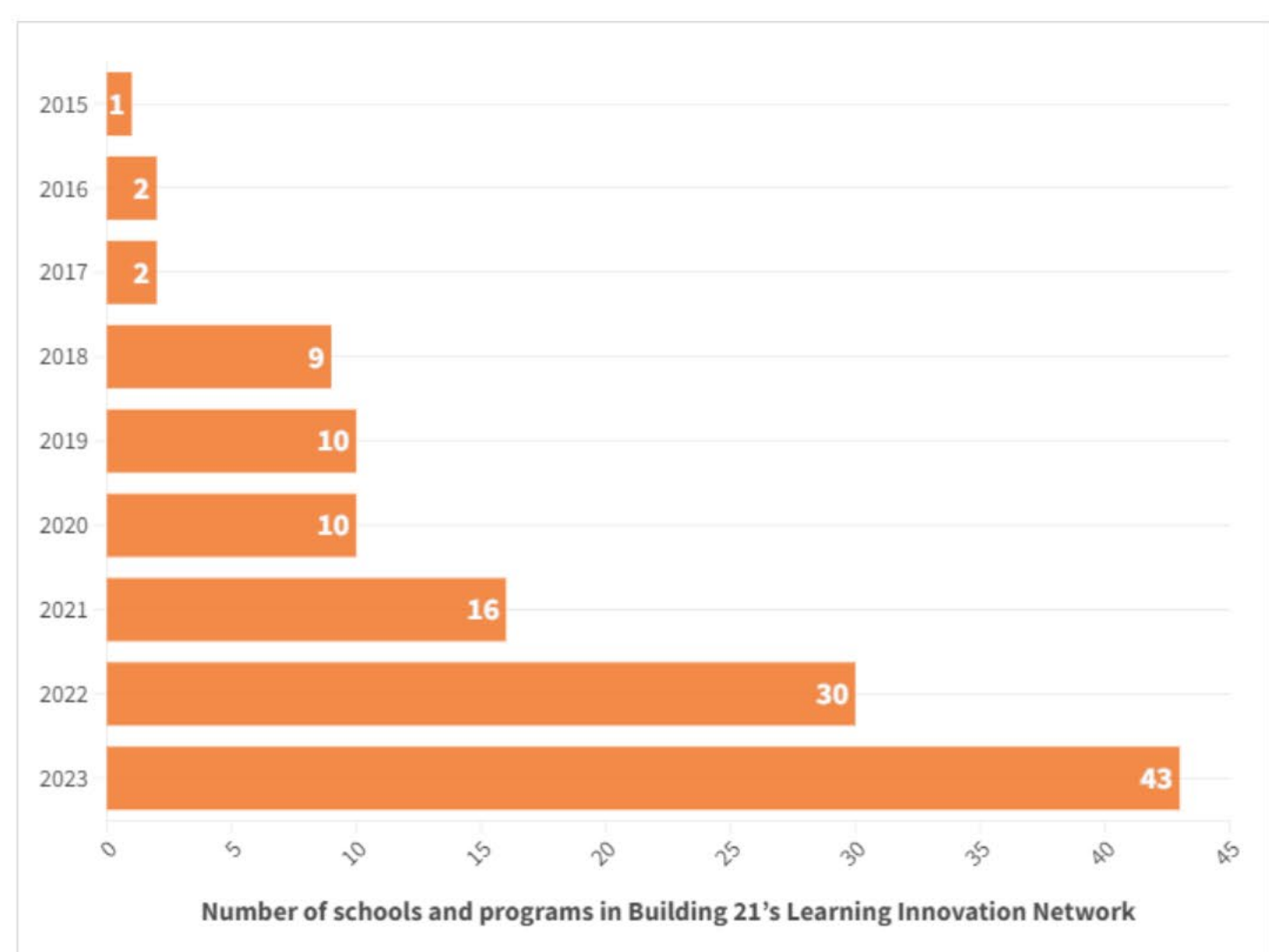
June 17, 2019



First Graduating Class – Allentown

Building 21 Allentown high school graduates its first senior class. The graduation rate (89.9%) far exceeds the average (71%) for comparable schools across the state.

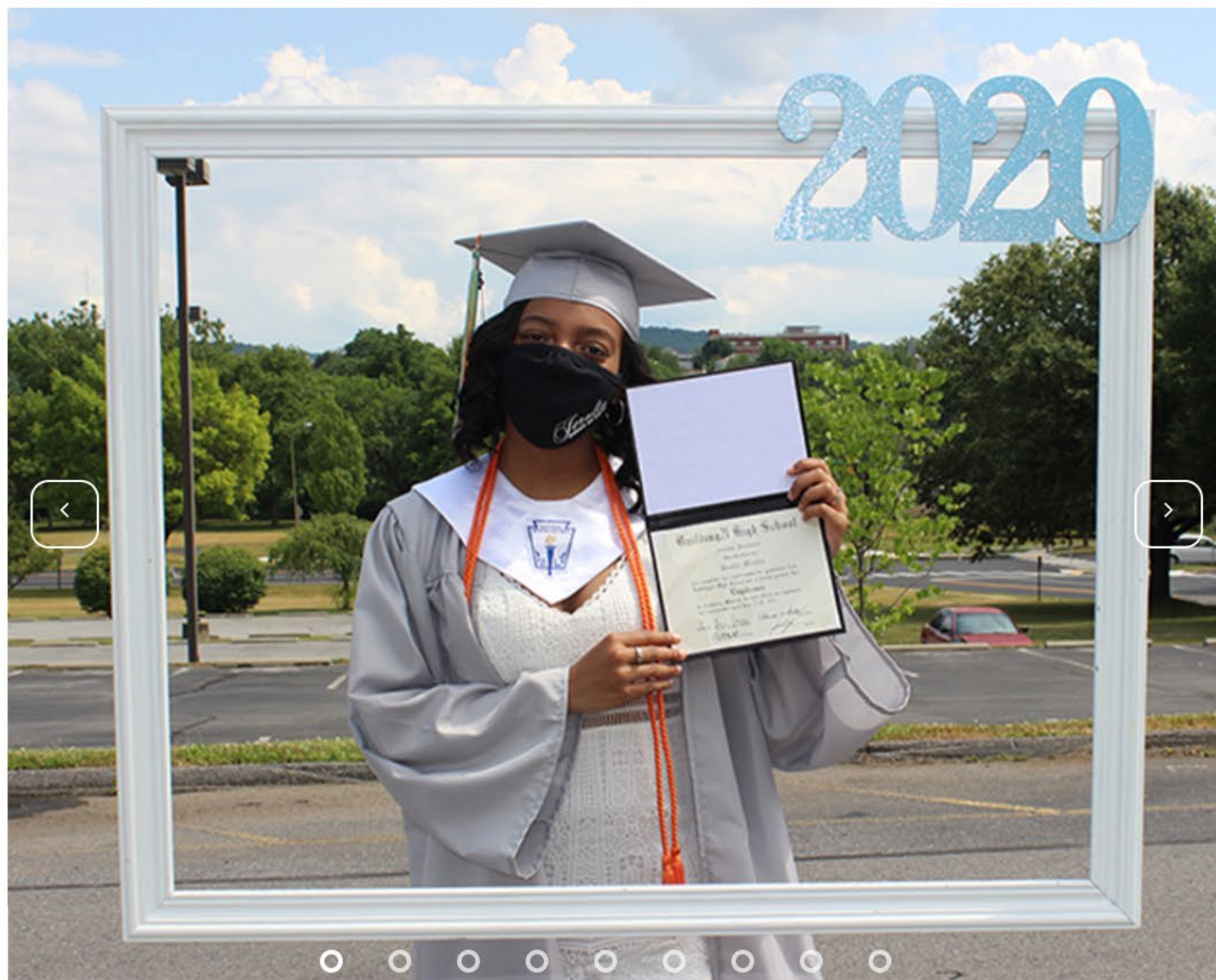
August 2019



Number of students served by Network partner schools reaches 5,000

The Learning Innovation Network grows to nine members, collectively reaching 5,000 students with the Building 21 model.

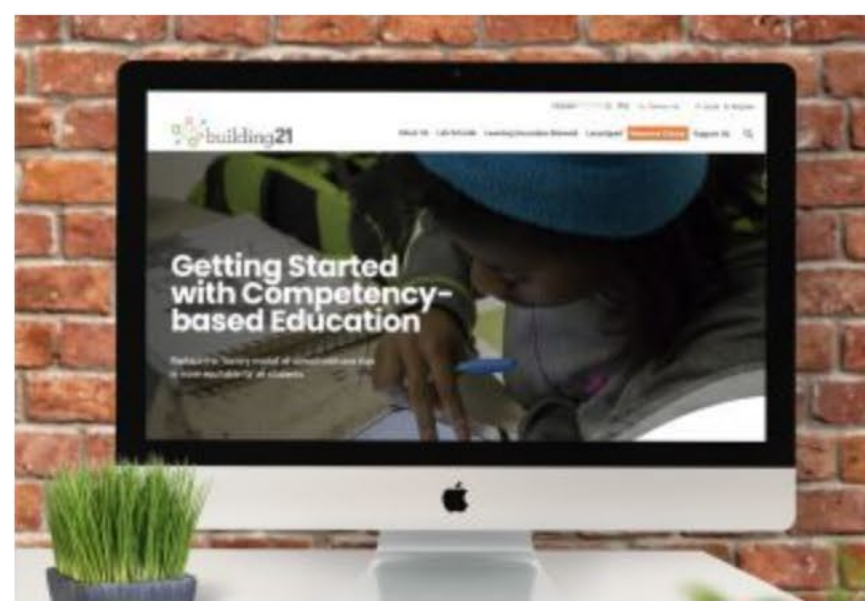
June 2020



Lab Schools hold innovative socially-distanced graduations

Our high schools in Philadelphia and Allentown find creative ways to celebrate their graduating seniors while adhering to COVID protocols, including drive-through and drive-by ceremonies.

December 14, 2021



New platform for open resources debuts

We launch a new platform to provide free access to our resources. The first school to sign up that day later becomes a Learning Innovation Network partner.

December 2022



Development begins on Beacon Learning

This platform will enable any school, district, and program to unleash the power of personalized, anytime/anywhere mastery-based learning.

January 2023



Launchpad lifts off

The first cohort of high school students begins Launchpad, our new "learn-and-earn" workforce development program.

April 11, 2023



1,000th member joins our Learning Innovation Network

The Learning Innovation Network sees steady growth in sign-ups since the launch of our new online resources platform two years earlier.

Launchpad

Building accelerated pathways that connect high school students to high paying tech careers

Inspired by focus groups with graduates from our Lab Schools, Launchpad was designed to equip students with the credentials, skills, mindsets, and experiences to thrive by “blurring the lines” between K-12 systems, higher education, and workforce development.

Learnings in three key areas informed the Launchpad design. First, an increasing number of young people are looking for ways to build skills and networks to connect to good paying careers outside of a traditional college pathway. Second, certain parts of the IT sector have reevaluated the credentials needed to secure a good-paying job and have moved to a skills-based hiring approach. Third, while schools want to create opportunities to connect students to their passions, it is challenging to “do it all” on their own. Bringing together a network of schools enables scale and an increase in available opportunities that match student interests.

Launchpad ensures that students across Philadelphia have access to our program, are equipped with the knowledge and experiences to make informed decisions about their futures, demonstrate mastery in their technical and future-ready skills, and have robust professional networks to be competitive in the local tech job market. Our programming is intentionally designed to fast-track traditionally under-represented young people into high-earning tech careers. These careers include roles in software development, data analytics, cybersecurity, and cloud computing.

- **The average tech salary in Philadelphia is \$100,551, with developers even higher at \$105,069¹**
- **Philadelphia currently counts 134,746 tech jobs which includes 28,820 software developers¹**
- **While more than half of Philadelphia residents identify as Black or Latinx, only 9% of all tech workers identify as Black and 4% as Latinx²**



What our students are saying about Launchpad:

“I am so glad the Launchpad team has given me the support I need to pursue my true self and positively impact the world.”

—Isaac, Ben Franklin HS

“This program supported me by taking us to professional tech work places to see what’s happening behind the scenes, which gave me motivation and ideas about what I want to do.”

—Keith, The U School

“I am very grateful to the program for giving me the tools to enrich my knowledge, grow as a person, create connections with incredible people and give me their support to be better every day. Very grateful to each person there.”

—Maria, Furness HS

1. technical.ly’s State-of-the-Philadelphia-Tech-Economy

2. Interactive Map data from CompTIA on Cyberstates.org.

Launchpad's 1st Year, by the Numbers:

71%

Earned College Credits

In addition to technical training, students are able to earn college credits through the program.

84%

Attendance

Launchpad students have been showing up and showing out. We have seen an average daily attendance of 84%.

98

Applicants

We received applications from 98 students representing 20 schools for our first cohort.

801

Market Street

We have signed a lease and moved into a dedicated space at 801 Market Street in the heart of downtown Philadelphia.

\$17,875

Stipends

Launchpad is a true "learn and earn" program. We have paid out over \$17k in stipends for the completion of key milestones.



Meet Launchpad Supporter:

Chris Brown

Global Director of Information Technology and Cyber Security at DecisivEdge in Wilmington, DE

Chris Brown has been in senior leadership roles in technology for the last decade, but he's also quick to point out, "I'm a proud Philadelphia graduate of Swenson Arts and Technology High School." After graduating, he participated in the school district's Urban Technology Project and, he adds, "that became the basis of my career."

Brown supports Launchpad by meeting with students and also by serving as a judge at "Ignite," the program's Shark Tank-like event where students pitch technology-based solutions to problems in their own communities. **"The pitch competition absolutely blew me away,"** he says. "I remember thinking: *Wow, these are projects that I could take to the other senior leaders at my company, and we could instantly run with them. It tells you about the quality of work that's being done at Launchpad.*"

Brown also spends as much time as he can talking with students, and these conversations often have a personal impact. "I see a lot of myself in these students — knowing that I loved computers, but not really understanding what that meant as a career path. So, I understand kids who have a general sense of what they want to do with their lives but don't know exactly which path to follow."

That's why Brown is so committed to Launchpad. "I understand from an educational perspective how important these programs can be, particularly for the populations they serve. I was given a chance by someone who saw something in me and allowed me to get to this space. Launchpad is that opportunity for students who otherwise might never have had one to get that knowledge and mentorship so that they can go where they want to go."

"After my very first conversations with Launchpad students, I knew this was something I wanted to be a part of. I wanted to continue the conversation and continue to work with these students. It's really hard to put into words just how much these experiences mean to me."

View a highlight reel from the Ignite pitch competition [>](#)

“I was given a chance by
someone who saw
something in me....

Launchpad is that
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who otherwise might
never have had one.”

— Chris Brown



Learning Innovation Network

**Because school should be
awesome for everyone.**

After the opening of our Lab Schools, Building 21 received requests from schools and districts across the country who wanted to transition to a more personalized, competency-based approach. In 2017, we began providing coaching, consulting, and systems to select schools and districts interested in moving to a competency-based learning and assessment model. Through our Learning Innovation Network, we provide our partners with a comprehensive solution that includes a competency framework for adults and students; a project-based instructional model; intensive leadership coaching, professional development, and change management support; and an integrated learning management systems suite including a data warehouse and a powerful analytics platform.

Drawing from a decade of experience working with schools and districts across the country, we are excited to be developing a new version of our learning management system—Beacon Learning—designed explicitly for competency-based education. We released version 1.0 of Beacon Learning in the Summer of 2023, and entered into pilots with select partners in the Fall of 2023.

By the end of fiscal year 2023, the Learning Innovation Network had 43 partner schools and school districts, serving more than 23,000 students. In addition, thousands more practitioners, schools, and other organizations from across the country and around the world access and utilize our free published resources each year.





Meet *Learning Innovation Network*
Partner:

Susan Poppe

**Principal of Waukesha East Alternative School in Waukesha,
Wisconsin**

When Sue Poppe became the principal of Waukesha East Alternative School three years ago, she recalls thinking, "this is supposed to be an alternative school, but it functions like a mini traditional school. And if that approach didn't work for our kids there, what makes you think it's going to work here?"

Looking for models to transform her school and engage her students, Poppe discovered the Building 21 Learning Innovation Network. "Their learning model was exciting," she says, "and Sandra, Tom, and Heather provided all of our professional development and resources. Our teachers put in a tremendous amount of work to plan projects, to do the mapping, and implement a new assessment system. They went through the fire, but this year they've come out so strong."

Poppe appreciated Building 21's desire for continuous feedback. "They cared deeply about how our staff were experiencing the new models. They'd ask *what's working and what's not*. *What do you need from us?* And then they'd take those suggestions and improve the models. As a result, the staff felt heard; they felt valued."

Reflecting on her work with Building 21, Poppe says, "this is a true partnership, and that relationship is key to our success. The teamwork that has developed is like nothing I've ever seen in 34 years of teaching. I truly have never had this type of a support network for the benefit of our kids, and I think my teachers feel the same way. And our kids are just thriving. We couldn't do this without Building 21." Furthermore, she adds, "Our graduation rate went from 67% up to 86% in one year."

Poppe recalls a recent meeting with the school board in her home community. Members were aware of her work at Waukesha East and were interested in learning more. "They asked me *'what do we need to do?'* And I said, *'you need to call Building 21.'*"

“This is a true partnership, and that relationship is key to our success...

It’s like nothing I’ve ever seen in 34 years of teaching.”

— Susan Poppe

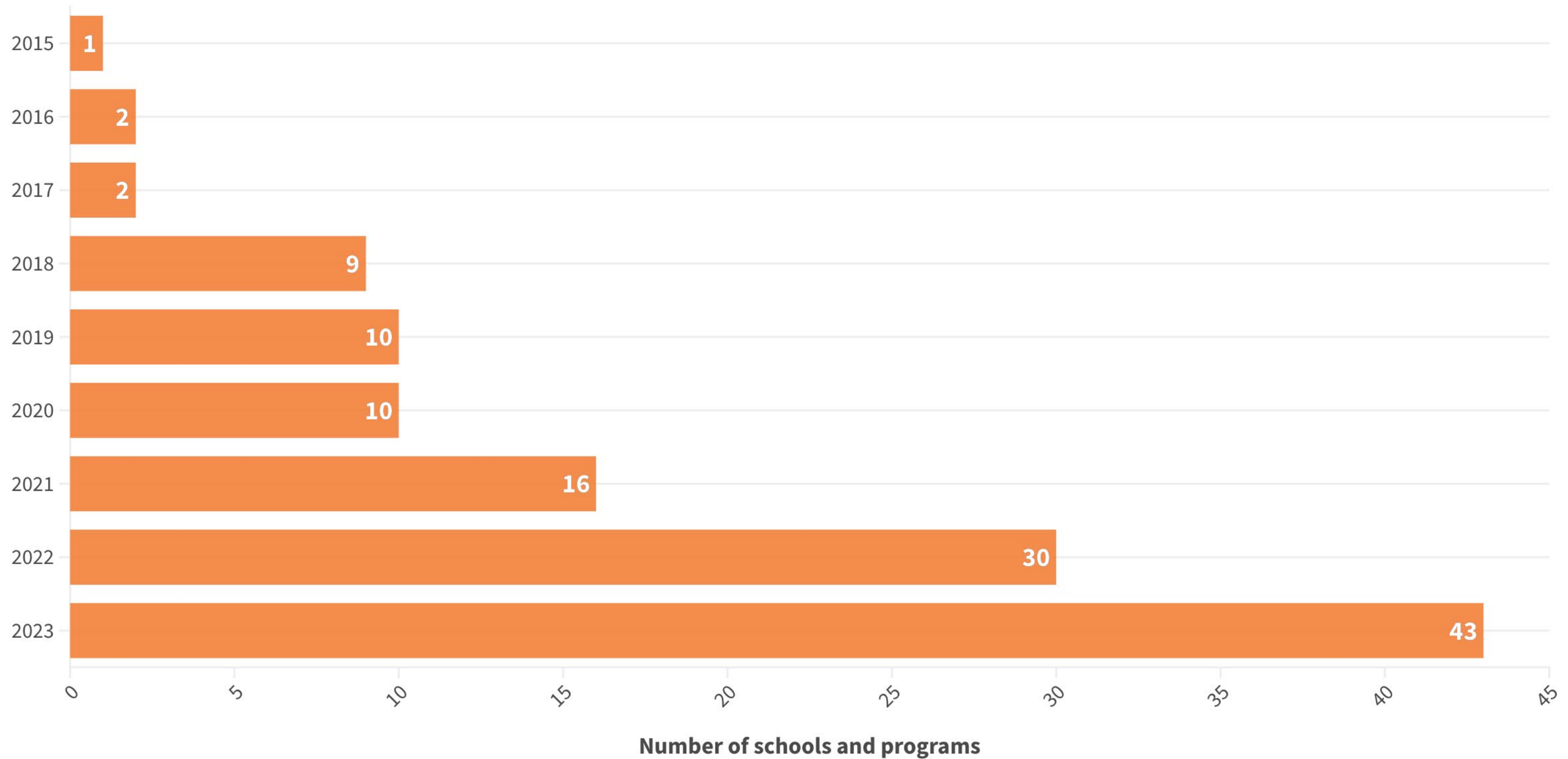


86%

GRADUATION RATE

Waukesha East's graduation increased from 67% to 86% after one year of working with Building 21.

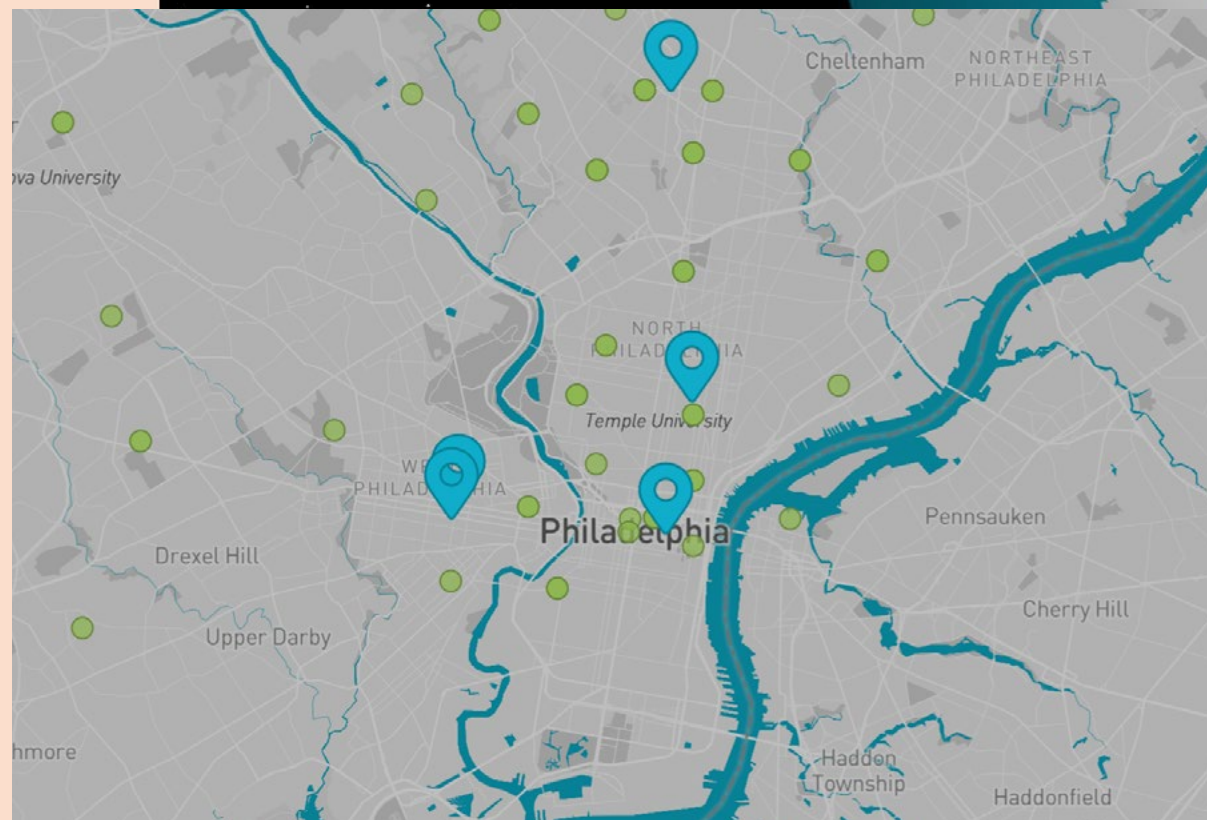
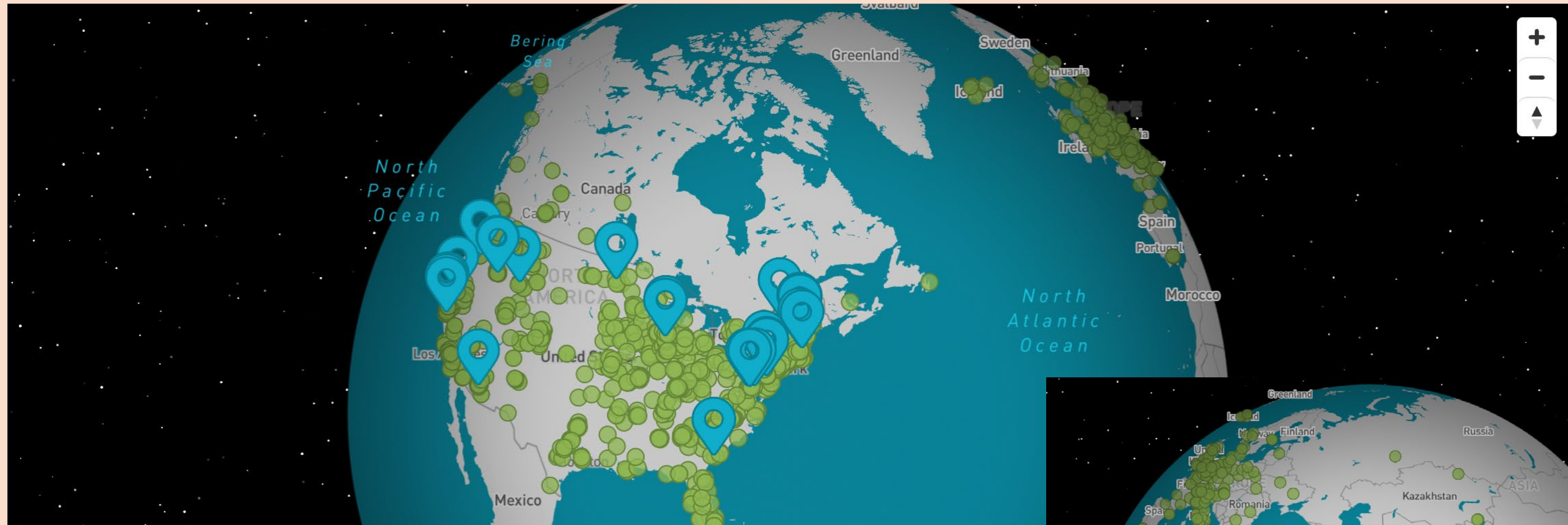
The number of partner schools and programs in our network has increased significantly over the past decade:



In addition to our Learning Innovation Network **partners** 📍, more than 1,000 individuals and schools in the US and around the world have signed up as **members** ● and downloaded our Open Resources.



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Lab Schools

Passion. Power. Agency.

While many things have changed since we began planning for the opening of our Philadelphia and Allentown Lab Schools a decade ago, the core design principles—a *foundation of strong relationships, real-world learning opportunities, and competency-based assessment*—have withstood the test of time. We have seen the impact of these ideas on the nearly 800 students who have graduated from our Lab Schools. Each year, close to 100 partners have engaged with our students providing real-world learning experiences.





Meet *Lab School* Graduate:

Angel Lebron

**Operations Manager at FedEx Ground in Orlando, FL
Building 21 Philadelphia, Class of 2018**

Angel Lebron grew up in the North Philadelphia neighborhood of Feltonville and was a member of Building 21's inaugural Class of 2018. He went on to Kutztown University, graduating in three years, and then held professional positions including Pathways Manager for Building 21, a consultant with BNY Mellon, and his current role as Operations Manager and supervisor for FedEx Ground, in Orlando, FL.

Angel points to numerous experiences in high school that benefitted him, such as a dual enrollment program with Community College of Philadelphia, entrepreneurship camp at Penn State Abington, and the Deloitte Leadership Academy. "Our teachers at Building 21 knew what would be required for college and made sure we were ready," he recalls. "They stressed public speaking and presentations, time management, and constantly learning outside the curriculum—always taking advantage of what the school was offering both inside and outside the classrooms." The Deloitte program included a paid internship, and Angel is still in regular touch with his mentor from the company.

Selecting Kutztown University for his postsecondary work, Angel majored in business administration with a minor in Spanish, served in leadership roles in several campus organizations, and mentored other first-generation college students—all while working full-time with FedEx. "I maintained that level of effort for about two years," he says, "because I knew about the importance of building those networks and those connections, so I was trying to put those in place even though I had a full course load and a full-time job."

Angel continues to grow and thrive. "My social and interpersonal skills have definitely improved over time, just being able to communicate effectively. As a manager at FedEx, I have thirty employees working under me and I have to communicate with them every single day."

He also spoke about the power of relationships. "I've learned how important it is to maintain those networks. I understood the value of establishing connections, but I didn't necessarily understand the importance of reaching out regularly to ensure that they're still in place and just keeping that rapport."



“The most important thing I learned at Building 21 is ‘do not hesitate to jump on an opportunity’....Take [those chances], cherish them, and learn from them.”

“And there’s a select few of us that still reach out to Building 21 and try to do our part, helping the next generation of students....There’s always great energy whenever I go in the building.”

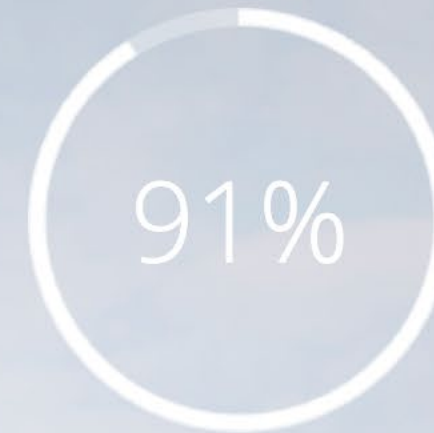
— Angel Lebron



A decade of learning:

2,348
Students Served

Lab Schools 2021-2023:



GRADUATION RATE

Since opening, our Lab Schools have achieved a cumulative graduation rate over 86%, including 91% over the last 2 years. These results compare favorably with all schools in Pennsylvania, and especially favorable relative to schools that serve student populations with similar demographic characteristics.

We received approval to open our first Lab School in Philadelphia in 2013. Building 21 Philadelphia admitted its first class of ninth graders the following year and Allentown opened the year after that. Combined, these high schools have served a total of 2,348 students since they opened. Our school teams have consistently emphasized the power of deep relationships with our students, and we believe this has been critical to the success of both schools.

83

Colleges & Universities

22

States

Our graduates have attended 83 colleges and universities in 22 states across the country.

Albright College • All-State Career School- Essington • American Intercontinental University • American Public University System • Arcadia University • Automotive Training Center • Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania – Mansfield • Boston University • Bryn Athyn College of the New Church • Bucks County Community College • Cabrini University • California College of the Arts • California State University – Long Beach • Cedar Crest College • Central Piedmont Community College • Chestnut Hill College • Cheyney University of Pennsylvania • Citrus College • Cleveland State University • College of Dupage • Columbus State Community College • Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania • Community College of Philadelphia • CUNY Bronx Community College • CUNY Queens College • Delaware College of Art & Design • Delaware County Community College • Delaware State University • Delaware Valley University • DeSales University • Eastern Gateway Community College • East Stroudsburg University • Edward Waters College • Full Sail University • Grand Canyon University • Harcum College • Harrisburg University of Science and Technology • Hocking Technical College • Holy Family University • Illinois Wesleyan University • Indiana University of Pennsylvania • Inter American University of Puerto Rico – Aguadilla • Jackson State University • Kutztown University • Laney College • La Salle University • Lehigh Carbon Community College • Lincoln University • Lock Haven University • Lycoming College • Manor College • Mansfield University • Maryville University • Montgomery County Community College • Moravian University • Muhlenberg College • National University College – IBC Yauco • Neumann University • Norfolk State University • Northampton Community College • North Central College • Notre Dame College of Ohio • Ocean County College • Orleans Technical College • Peirce College • Pennsylvania State University • Pennsylvania Western University • Phoenix College • Purdue University Global • Reading Area Community College • Roxborough Memorial Hospital • Saint Luke’s Hospital School of Nursing • Shippensburg University • Southern New Hampshire • Strayer University – Washington • SUNY Farmingdale • Temple University • University of Arkansas at Monticello • University of Maryland Eastern Shore • University of Maryland Global Campus • University of Phoenix • Wartburg College • Wilson College • York College of Pennsylvania •



Meet *Lab School* Graduate:

Michelle Wilson

Peer Navigator at Project Silk/Valley Youth House in Allentown, PA

Building 21 Allentown, Class of 2020

Michelle is a proud member of Building 21 Allentown's Class of 2020. Believing that the school needed more space for youth voice, Michelle co-founded the Love Club, a gay-straight alliance. While searching for resources, she learned about Project Silk (now Silk), a youth-led, adult-supported LGBTQ+ drop-in program, and was deeply impressed by it. After a year of college, Michelle applied for and was hired as a peer navigator for Silk where she continues to deliver programming focused on mental health and sex education.

Michelle credits Building 21 with helping on her journey. "There were so many opportunities for me to figure out my learning style, and to gain experience in the community. I spent time at the Lehigh Valley Health Network and at an engineering STEM camp at Lehigh University. It was amazing to explore different career paths and pathways at a young age."

Looking back, Michelle particularly appreciates the relationships she built at Building 21. "There were so many possibilities for student-teacher connections because the classes were small. I developed close bonds with several teachers that still inspire me today. They take the time to help you understand and give you options. That's why I think it worked so well for me."

Looking forward, "One of my end goals in life is to open my own nonprofit that supports youth and young adults. I want to be that person that has the access and ability to house and help people most in need."

Reflecting on her experiences at Building 21, Michelle says, "Something that I would definitely tell young students is to choose a high school that lets you find your dream and pushes you to follow it. That's what Building 21 did for me."





“There were so many possibilities for student-teacher connections....

I developed close bonds with several teachers that still inspire me today.”

— Michelle Wilson



Real-World Learning Partners

Connecting learning to the real world is an integral part of the Building 21 approach. Our lab schools make this happen every day for students like Angel and Michelle through **internships, dual enrollment, classes co-taught by practicing professionals**, and a range of **career exposure** activities.

These experiences are made possible by businesses, organizations, universities, and individuals who visit our schools and welcome students into their workplaces. We are deeply grateful to all of the partners who brought learning to life for our students in Allentown and Philadelphia over the past year:

Allens Lane Art Center
Allentown Art Museum
Amjad Dental Associates
Arcadia University
ArtsQuest/21st Century
Bebashi
Bentley Systems
Big Brothers Big Sisters Association
Bill of Rights Institute
Bradbury Sullivan Center
Broad St Animal Hospital
Cedar Crest College
Center for Black Educators
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
Chosen 300
Cocolife.black
Community College of Philadelphia
Community College of Philadelphia –
Career and Advanced Technology
Center
Concilio
Crayola
DaEssence of Perfection Hair Salon
DaVinci Science Center
DeSales University
Diverse Body Sculpting
DT Autobody
Eat Right Philly
Edmonds Elementary School
Education Plus Health

Empire Beauty School
Fabric Workshop
First Builders Construction
Fleishman School of Art
Fox Chase Farm
Genentech
GoSmartTrack
Guiding Star Ministries
Halal To Go Catering
Harrisburg University
Jay's Reptiles
Jeantrix
Jefferson Einstein Medical Center
Jefferson University
John F. McCloskey School
Junior Achievement
Kencrest
Kutztown University
Lady of Fatima Home Health Care
LaSalle University
Launchpad
League of Women Voters
Lehigh County Board of Elections
Lehigh County Conservation District
Lehigh County Workforce
Board/CareerLink
Lehigh University
Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN)
Lehigh Valley Youth House

MADE Design Institute
Martin Luther King High School
Mindy Flexer Art Studio
Moore College of Art & Design
Moravian College
Mt. Airy Church of God in Christ
Mural Arts
National Constitution Center
Nutrition Unlimited
Office of Councilman Anthony Phillips
Office of Mayor-elect Cherelle Parker
Olympus
On Track
PA State Representative Stephen
Kinsey – District 201
PA State Senator Art Haywood –
District 4
Parent-Infant Center
PCOM (Philadelphia College of
Osteopathic Medicine)
PECO (Philadelphia Electric Company)
Pennell Elementary School
Pennsylvania Society for Biomedical
Research (PSBR)
Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts
Philadelphia Children's Foundation
Philadelphia Free Library

Philadelphia Learning Collaborative
Philadelphia Stem Ecosystem
POPPYN – Temple University
Community Collaborative
Prince Hall Elementary School
Project Silk
Salon Styles by Aleta
Sanders Mechanics
Santa Clara University – MOBI (My
Own Business Institute)
School District of Philadelphia Office
of Post-Secondary Readiness
Seanime Animation / Digital Art
St. Luke's
Story Xperiential/PIXAR
Temple University
University of PA – BioEyes
University of PA – Department of
Nanotechnology Engineering
University of PA – Netter Center for
Community Partnerships
Victoria's Kitchen
Wagner Middle School
West Oak Lane Senior Center
What I Wish I Knew Foundation
WHYY Media Labs
Wissahickon Charter School
YWCA Allentown

2022-23 Donors

\$100,000+

**Cambiar Education
Charles and Molly Linehan Family Foundation
Siegel Family Endowment
Spring Point Partners
Stand Together Trust**

\$10,000 to \$99,999

**1Philadelphia
Drant Charitable Fund
Haynes Charitable Fund
The McLean Contributionship
PNC
PPL
Tahoe Blue Foundation
Tim and Devon Hathaway Fund**

\$1,000 to \$9,999

**Adam Smith
American Bank
Anonymous
Crawford Hubbard
Dan Rhoton
David Carliner
David Clapp
Doug Brown
Ethan Weiss
Graham Partners
John Nehra
Justin Klein
Lisa Detwiler
Lissette Santana
Mohamad Makhzoumi
Nick Rudenstine
Dr. Stacy Holland**

Statement of Financial Position

	2023	2022
ASSETS		
Cash	2,049,965	2,729,842
Security Deposit	313,078	0
Receivable	154,313	26,443
Leasehold Improvements	1,484,142	0
Lease - Right of Use	3,009,634	0
Other	25,969	1,219
Total Assets	7,037,101	2,757,504
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities	45,587	35,957
Non-current Lease Liability	4,774,120	0
Total Liabilities	4,819,707	35,957
NET ASSETS		
Unrestricted	1,508,759	1,629,191
Restricted	754,222	1,092,356
Total Net Assets	2,262,981	2,721,547
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	7,037,101	2,757,504

Statement of Activities

	2023	2022
INCOME		
Contributions	1,603,110	2,306,988
PPP Loan Forgiveness	0	150,000
ERTC Tax Credit	250,301	0
School & Consulting Fees	440,358	258,402
Other	58,089	53,736
Total Income	2,351,858	2,769,126
EXPENSES		
Program Services	2,354,240	1,567,364
Management & General	268,219	231,553
Fundraising	187,965	60,193
Total Expenses	2,810,424	1,859,110

View from the Philadelphia offices of Seer Interactive, host and sponsor of Launchpad's Ignite pitch competition in 2023.

Background photos and video by Marco Calderon. [>](#)

Thank you for reading our 2022–23 Annual Report.



Learn more about Launchpad, our new workforce development program



Our work is fueled by donor support. You can amplify our impact by giving.



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