

20 YEARS BRIGHT

BRIGHT STAR SCHOOLS 2023 IMPACT REPORT





20 YEARS OF BELIEVING IN

Unlimited possibilities.

When an organization reaches a milestone like a 20th anniversary, it's important to reflect on the past, but only in the context of what the future can bring. In a sense, Bright Star Schools is an embodiment of our students, growing from humble beginnings to exceed expectations. We have much to celebrate from just the past 10 years alone. Here are a few of the highlights:

- **63% of our class of 2016 graduates completed higher education within 6 years**, compared to just 25% of students from similar schools nationwide.
- **76% of our class of 2021 graduates persisted from year one to year two in a 4-year college or university**, compared to 72% of students from similar schools nationwide.
- **86% of our class of 2023 graduates matriculated to higher education**, compared to just 50% of students from similar schools nationwide.

These results are a testament to providing student-centric, holistic education in environments that are welcoming and supportive. Successful academic growth comes from a balance of nurturing and challenging our students. By also motivating and inspiring them, we can ensure nothing stops them from pursuing higher education and their dreams.

In this Impact Report, we're providing a brief summary of the Bright Star Schools story, which is made up of thousands of individual stories. We will touch on a few as examples, so you can imagine the exponential impact education can have on our communities and you.



FROM OUR LEAD EXECUTIVE OFFICER

What we've sown.

Dear Bright Star Community and Supporters,

My paternal grandfather was brought to California through the Bracero program and worked in the fields to help feed America. In doing so, he planted roots for a life here in the United States, and I have reaped the benefits. That's why I've dedicated my life to ensuring that I continue to strengthen the legacy of my parents' and grandparents' stories and sacrifice, and to do the same for others who have similar stories of pain, fury, deep love, and a vision of something better.

I believe students deserve a positive school environment and rigorous curriculum that fosters the self-efficacy, critical thinking, and knowledge they need to access and participate in society, as well as have active influence over the conditions of their lives.

That is what attracted me to Bright Star Schools, whose holistic learning experience emphasizes academic excellence and the nurturing of individual talents, so students can pursue higher education and fulfilling lives.

For 20 years, Bright Star has enabled, supported, and fueled the dreams of our students and their families. Bright Star students are planted deeply in the rich soil of the schools we tend, so that they have unlimited potential to grow and bloom.

Ana L. Martinez
Lead Executive Officer

"I've dedicated my life to strengthening the legacy of my family's stories and sacrifice by supporting others who have similar stories of pain, fury, deep love, and a vision of something better."

- ANA MARTINEZ, LEO





We believe that by transforming education, communities can transform themselves and flourish.

We go where we're needed.

Bright Star Schools currently serves three communities across Los Angeles: South Los Angeles, Koreatown, and the San Fernando Valley. We believe that by transforming education, communities can transform themselves and flourish. *For the past 20 years, we have made a significant impact by opening nine amazing schools.*

SOUTH LOS ANGELES SCHOOLS

- Stella Elementary Charter Academy (grades TK-4)
- Stella Middle Charter Academy (grades 5-8)
- Stella High Charter Academy (grades 9-12)

KOREATOWN SCHOOLS

- Rise Kohyang Elementary School (grades TK-5)
- Rise Kohyang Middle School (grades 6-8)
- Rise Kohyang High School (grades 9-12)

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY SCHOOLS

- Valor Academy Elementary School (grades TK-4)
- Valor Academy Middle School (grades 5-8)
- Valor Academy High School (grades 9-12)

We currently serve more than 3,600 students. They come from diverse backgrounds yet share common needs:

- 94% Eligible for Free and Reduced Meal Program
- 26% English Language Learners
- 13% receive Inclusive (Special) Education services and supports

We're also proud to have more than 2,200 Bright Star alumni, who we continue to serve through our Alumni Support and College Success Program that guides them along their higher education pathways.

How to achieve academic excellence that exceeds expectations.

Excellence requires solid planning and focused work. While creating a positive learning environment provides a foundation at Bright Star Schools, we've also provided ways for students to get a head start on higher education.

Importantly, all (100%) of Bright Star's high school graduates are eligible for admission to a Cal State or University of California school, compared to just 51% of students statewide. We support all of our students to receive financial aid and scholarships so that their loan amounts are as low as possible.



At Stella High Charter Academy, students can earn college credits through Advanced Placement (AP) courses and dual enrollment at Los Angeles Southwest College. Every year, many Stella High students receive college scholarships, which have included full ride scholarships to Cal State Universities, the University of Chicago, Colby College, Colorado College, Dickinson College, Hobart William & Smith College, the University of Notre Dame, and Northwestern University.

Valor Academy High School also offers dual enrollment opportunities with Los Angeles Mission College and AP courses. Valor AP teacher Yogeshwari Patel was named the 2019 Hart Vision Charter School Teacher of the Year for supporting 100% of her students to pass their AP Biology exam.

AP courses are stepping stones to higher education.

Rise Kohyang High School (RKHS) has a strong higher education-focused culture, with 10 AP teachers, 13 AP Courses, 16 AP Sections, and also offers opportunities for students to self-study for additional AP exams.

In 2023, RKHS was awarded gold and silver distinction on the College Board's 2023 AP School Honor Roll, which recognizes schools that reflect a commitment to increasing college-going culture, providing opportunities for students to earn college credit, and maximizing college readiness.

Thanks to robust academics, AP courses, and strong social-emotional support, RKHS had a 98% high school graduation rate in 2023.



100% of Bright Star's high school graduates are eligible for admission to a Cal State or University of California school.

(Compared to just 51% of students statewide)



Yogeshwari Patel, an AP teacher at Valor Academy High School, was named the 2019 Hart Vision Charter School Teacher of the Year for supporting 100% of her students to pass their AP Biology exam.



**We've chosen a
smarter approach to
academic success.**



Charter public schools are uniquely positioned to implement innovations to better serve students, families, and communities. Bright Star Schools' whole child approach offers holistic support to every student, ensuring that all of their needs are met throughout their time on our campuses and far beyond. Over the years, we've created programs to provide additional support where needed, a few of which we have highlighted here.

Whole Child Approach: Special (Inclusive) Education

In 2009, we established our Special Education department, which grew exponentially in its first years to keep up with the growing and intensive needs of our students. Our population of students with individualized education programs is 13%, in line with the district and state averages.

In 2017, we renamed our Special Education department the Department of Inclusive Education to better reflect our spirit of inclusion, equity, and access for all. Our Resource Specialist teachers now hold the title of Inclusion Specialist teacher, a distinction unique to Bright Star Schools.

Whole Child Approach: Connections

In addition to robust Inclusive Education, our whole child approach was further bolstered by the launch of our Connections Program in 2011. At Bright Star Schools, we connect every student in every grade with a counselor who knows them, their needs, and their dreams. Our counselors' caseloads, which average approximately 130 students, are dramatically lower than the California state average of 509 students.

Whole Child Approach: Alumni Support

Our holistic approach doesn't end when a student graduates from high school. In 2013, we launched Bright Star's Alumni Support and College Success Program (ASCS) to provide up to six years of individualized, higher education support for our graduates. To date, the ASCS team has supported nearly 2,200 Bright Star Schools alumni on their higher education pathways.

The road to success is sometimes pretty bumpy.

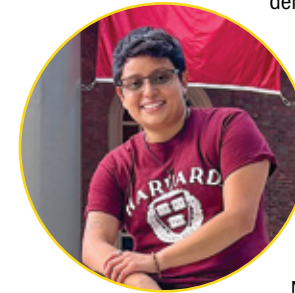
A few years after graduating from Stella High Charter Academy, Nancy Lara found herself in a tough situation. She'd taken a gap year for work, then enrolled at Cal State Northridge for a year, and later enrolled in Santa Monica College. With many family responsibilities,

Nancy was struggling to meet the demands of her studies, so she decided to meet with

Bright Star's Alumni Support and College Success program director, Genoveva Cortes. Together, they outlined an educational plan that would enable


Nancy to complete her associate's degree at Santa

Monica College, and then transfer to UC Santa Barbara. With support from Bright Star, Nancy did both, ultimately graduating summa cum laude with her bachelor's degree in 2022. After graduation, she attended Harvard's Graduate School of Education and earned her master's degree. Nancy currently works as a school outreach coordinator.



Nancy Lara

Stella High Charter Academy, Class of 2014
A.A., Santa Monica College, 2020
B.A., Sociology, UC Santa Barbara, 2022
M.A., Educational Leadership and Administration, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2023

A group of students are seated on a boat, looking out at a large, reddish-brown canyon wall. The students are wearing life jackets and hats. The water is greenish-brown, and the sky is clear blue. The canyon wall is massive and has some greenery at its base.

If you want kids to get a different perspective of the world, immerse them in nature to illustrate just how expansive their future can be. At Bright Star Schools, Life Experience Lessons have been integral to our curriculum for 20 years.

**To broaden our students' horizons,
we literally broaden the horizon.**



**The more students
learn about the world...**

*The more they learn
about themselves.*




One of the most effective ways to motivate students to work hard and succeed in their education is by providing them with a broader perspective of the world, to open their eyes to the unlimited opportunities that lay before them.

From the very beginning in 2003, our Life Experience Lessons (LELs) have been foundational to the educational experience at Bright Star Schools. Our students have had many “firsts” because of LELs: first time visiting national parks, first time riding bikes (and across the Golden Gate bridge, no less!), first time camping, first time traveling outside of California, first time on an airplane, etc. As Bright Star alumnus Mark Pacheco said, “Bright Star took me to places I’ve never dreamed of going. Bright Star opened me up to the world.”

At Bright Star Schools, we don’t view LELs as simple extracurricular activities. They are carefully planned and implemented components of the curriculum from elementary school through high school graduation.

As one might expect, elementary school students take local field trips to museums, parks, and performances. This is an important first step in showing them how easily they can access a larger physical world, while supplementing their in-class lessons.

Elementary school students take local field trips across Los Angeles to expand their learning beyond the classroom.



**“Bright Star took me to
places I’ve never dreamed of
going. Bright Star opened
me up to the world.”**



Middle and high school Bright Star students explore national parks and college campuses to experience unlimited possibilities.

In middle school, students take a giant leap, often going on camping trips and visiting national parks, where they literally broaden their horizons. For our students, immersing themselves in nature begins to open them up to the idea of their lives having no physical limits.

For high school students, we design experiences that encourage them to explore the possibilities of higher education and venturing out into adulthood. While most of our students will pursue higher education pathways in California, we've found that taking them on out-of-state trips infuses them

with energy and insight. Getting their feet on the ground in New York City, Washington D.C., or Chicago can have a transformational impact on their perspectives, reducing fears and sparking a desire for expansion and exploration.

Every one of our Life Experience Lessons acts as both a building block of education and as a window into what lies beyond. They are essential components to our Whole Child approach, which helps our students not only achieve their educational goals, but gives them more tools to succeed in their adult lives.

When a student is exceptionally bright, we help them reach for the stars.

In addition to LELs, Bright Star Schools also offers a competitive and rigorous after-school enrichment program for our exceptionally curious and motivated students. Ari Engelberg, former Executive Director of Bright Star Schools (2007-2015), initiated multiple partnership programs between Harvard-Westlake and Bright Star Schools. One such partnership is the Bridge Program, where select middle school students experience unique and innovative classes and activities, including robotics, visual and performing arts, electronic music, French, and Chinese.



Every time we open a school, we open doors.

Our goal is to help young people pursue fulfilling lives. Each time we open a school, thousands of students are provided with opportunities that would not have existed otherwise. *Thank you for joining us on this journey of purpose and possibility.*



2003

Our first school, Stella Middle Charter Academy, was founded.



2006

Stella High Charter Academy opened its doors.



2009

With strong community support and partnership, we founded Valor Academy Middle School.



2012

Rise Kohyang Middle School opened its doors in Koreatown.

2016 (cont'd)

Rise Kohyang High School opened its doors.



2016
2017

Stella High earned gold medals from US News & World Report two years straight.

2018

Stella Elementary Charter Academy was added in the West Adams community.



Also in 2018 - Valor Academy High School opened a permanent, state-of-the-art facility.



2019

Rise Kohyang Elementary School opened its doors.



CELEBRATING OUR GRADUATES **GROWING SUCCESS**

 **63%**

Of our class of 2016 graduates completed higher education within 6 years
(compared to just 25% of students from similar schools nationwide).

76% 

Of our class of 2021 graduates persisted from year one to year two in a 4-year college or university *(compared to 72% of students from similar schools nationwide).*

86% 

Of our class of 2023 graduates matriculated to higher education
(compared to just 50% of students from similar schools nationwide).



**VALOR ACADEMY
HIGH SCHOOL**
A BRIGHT STAR SCHOOL



**VALOR ACADEMY
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
A BRIGHT STAR SCHOOL

Also in 2012 –

Valor Academy Middle School was named a California Distinguished School.

2013

Valor Academy High School opened its doors.

2015

Valor Middle opened its permanent school campus in North Hills.

Rise Kohyang Middle School was named a California Gold Ribbon School.

2016

Valor Academy Elementary School opened its doors.

2020

Stella Middle opened a permanent home for our Gryffons, ensuring their continued success for generations to come.



2021

76% of our class of 2021 graduates persisted from year one to year two in a 4-year college or university, compared to 72% of students from similar schools nationwide.

2023

Valor Academy Elementary School secured a location to build a permanent school facility.

Rise Kohyang High School was awarded gold and silver distinction on the AP Honor Roll for their college-going culture and student preparation.

86% of Bright Star's class of 2023 graduates matriculated to higher education, compared to just 50% of students from similar schools nationwide.

2024

Rise Kohyang High School will have a brand-new, state-of-the-art campus.

From humble beginnings to bright futures.

Stella Middle Charter Academy: A Journey of Empowerment

In 2003, our first school, Stella Middle Charter Academy, was founded by Jeff Hilger to address the pressing need for quality public education in the West Adams community. Today, Principal Jane Han's leadership emphasizes holistic student development, fostering positive relationships and meeting social-emotional needs. The school is also committed to anti-biased and anti-racist practices, ensuring that the curriculum empowers students to champion equity.



In 2020, after 17 years of dedicated service, Stella Middle realized a long-cherished dream: the opening of a permanent home for our Gryffons, ensuring their continued success for generations to come.

Stella High Charter Academy: Soaring to New Heights

Building upon the legacy of Stella Middle, Stella High Charter Academy opened its doors in 2006. Principal Darryl Garris leads Stella High, offering a robust program that includes Advanced Placement college preparatory classes, dual enrollment with Los Angeles Southwest College, performing arts, competitive CIF sports teams, and enlightening College and Life Experience Lessons. In 2011, Stella High was named a California Distinguished School and earned gold medals from *US News & World Report* in 2016 and 2017. In 2022, Stella High was ranked among the top 7% of public high schools nationwide.

(Above) Stella Middle Charter Academy Principal Jan Han visits with two students outside the school. (Right) English teacher Javier Caldera works with a Stella High Charter Academy student.





In 2022, Stella High was ranked among the top 7% of public high schools nationwide.

Stella Elementary Charter Academy: The Legacy Continues

In 2018, Stella Elementary Charter Academy was added in the West Adams community, marking the next chapter in the Bright Star Schools legacy. Currently led by Principal Gene Castro, Stella Elementary provides a safe, joyful, and supportive environment where students are empowered to find their voice and become agents of change for society, country, and the world.

Making the most of everything.

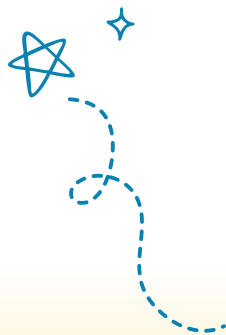
When she stepped onto the campus of Clark Atlanta University in fall 2023, Fatima Haynie took an important step in her educational career, and she also marked an important Bright Star milestone: she is the first of our students to attend an Historically Black College or University (HBCU). *“I’m so proud to be at Clark Atlanta University,” Fatima said. “The transition to college has been seamless, thanks to the preparation and ongoing support from Bright Star Schools.”*

While at Stella High Charter Academy, Fatima earned college credits through dual-college enrollment at LA Southwest College. She said, *“I didn’t have to wait two years to take classes in my major because of the credits I earned in high school. I’m making the most of my opportunities.”*



Fatima Haynie

Stella High Charter Academy, Class of 2023
Clark Atlanta University, Class of 2027 (anticipated)



Creating a hometown atmosphere with a global perspective.

Rise Kohyang Middle School: A First of Its Kind

When Bright Star wanted to expand our impact in other Los Angeles communities, we turned to a founding staff member. Dr. Eliza KimLy grew up in Koreatown and knew that Bright Star Schools could make a difference for the Koreatown community. With Dr. KimLy's guidance, Rise Kohyang Middle School opened in 2012, becoming the first school of its kind to serve the Korean community in Los Angeles. Now under the leadership of Principal Ruth Kim, Rise Kohyang Middle offers rigorous academic instruction and honors classes, as well as social-emotional learning and support.

Rise Kohyang High School: Shared Success

In 2016, Rise Kohyang High School opened its doors. Now under the leadership of Principal Cynthia Trigueros, Rise Kohyang High has grown into a strong and close-knit school community with dedicated staff members who support and guide our students. **It's the highest-scoring public high school in the Koreatown area, and the first three graduating classes had an average 97% cohort graduation rate.** We're thrilled that our Tritons will have a brand-new, and state-of-the-art campus in 2024!



Rise Kohyang Elementary School: A Solid Foundation

In 2019, Rise Kohyang Elementary School opened its doors and completed Bright Star Schools' transitional-kindergarten through 12th grade pathway in Koreatown. Led by Founding Principal Kaitlin Allen, the incredible staff and teachers focus on educating the whole child. They believe that welcoming, affirming, and loving each child will give them a strong foundation for school and life. As such, they prioritize strong relationships and provide their students with the resources they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.



Years of hard work and support pay off

It was evident early on that Younggyun Kim's future is especially bright. After graduating as co-valedictorian from both Rise Kohyang Middle School and High School, he was awarded a full-ride scholarship to attend USC. Rise Kohyang schools set Younggyun up for college success, both in challenging him academically and teaching him to establish good study habits.

At USC, Younggyun is successfully tackling a challenging biomedical engineering degree. Serving in leadership roles of USC's Korean-American Scientists and Engineers Association, he also works as an undergraduate research assistant at the Benayoun Lab at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology. He intends to pursue a PhD after graduation. ***"My Bright Star teachers supported, encouraged, and challenged me to succeed. I hope they see a good return on their investment."***

Younggyun Kim

Rise Kohyang High School, Class of 2020
Bachelor's in Biomedical/Medical Engineering,
USC, Class of 2024 (anticipated)



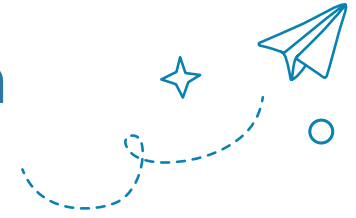


One of our core values, kohyang means hometown, celebrated with a mural on the side of the Rise Kohyang Elementary and Middle School building. (inset)



Principal May Oey works with Valor Academy Elementary School students.

The most important thing we teach is that *possibilities are unlimited.*

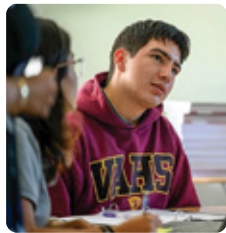


Valor Academy Middle School: Distinguishing Itself

In 2009, with strong community support and partnership, Hrag Hamalian (Bright Star Schools' former executive director from 2015-2023) founded Valor Academy Middle School. He launched the school with a vision of realizing the potential and success for every student who walks through our doors, no matter the circumstances or challenges that might be present in their lives.



In 2012, just three years after its founding, Valor Academy Middle School was named a California Distinguished School. In 2015, Valor Middle opened its permanent school campus in North Hills.



Valor Academy High School: Top of the Class

In 2013, Bright Star Schools opened Valor Academy High School to continue our optimistic vision, love for our students, and an unwavering commitment to their success. Under the current leadership of Principal Jennifer Anaya Sanchez, Valor High teaches our students the importance of being leaders who pursue excellence through integrity, justice, and community. In 2018,

we opened a permanent, state-of-the-art facility. **Our students have continued to thrive, and in 2022 Valor High was ranked in the top 10% of public high schools nationwide.**

Valor Academy Elementary School: Well-Being, Well-Educated

In 2016, we opened Valor Academy Elementary School to complete our transitional kindergarten through 12th grade pathway in the San Fernando Valley. The Valor Elementary community is filled with dedicated teachers, counselors, and staff who support our students holistically. We have an innovative mindfulness program to enhance our students' well-being, and a teacher residency program (at all Bright Star Schools) to support our school's future teachers. In 2023, we secured a location to build a permanent school facility that our Valor Cubs can call their own.

We help students get an academic advantage.

Elijah Garcia is in his second year at Cal State Northridge. He is excelling as a mechanical engineering major, earning a place on the Dean's List. Elijah credits Valor Academy with preparing him to thrive in a tough field of study.


He arrived with 34 college credits that he earned through a combination of Advanced Placement (AP) course credit from Valor Academy High School and dual-enrollment credit through Valor's partnership with Los Angeles Mission College.



Elijah was also selected to participate in the Extended Opportunity Program (EOP), which has the explicit goal of, "improving access for low-income, first-generation, and historically disadvantaged students with potential for academic success by making higher education a possibility." Through EOP, Elijah, and many other Valor alumni, transitioned seamlessly to CSUN. *"At Valor Academy, my goal wasn't to simply graduate. I used every resource to position myself for college."*

Elijah Garcia

Valor Academy High School, Class of 2022
Bachelor's in Engineering, Cal State
Northridge, Class of 2026 (*anticipated*)



Give young people a better path, and they'll take it.

The desire for a full and meaningful life seems to be in the very DNA of most young people. All we have to do as educators and caring adults is to offer viable options and provide stable support. The children will do the rest. We see it year after year at Bright Star Schools. Visit any one of our schools, and you'll see it too.



CLASS
OF
2023



Beyond books, beyond classrooms, beyond graduation.

by *Vanessa Ramirez*

As I approached the front entrance of Valor Academy Middle School – my new school back in August of 2009 – little did I know I had just walked into the best thing I could have ever done for myself.

During my first year at Valor, I quickly learned how truly special this place is. Not just for me, but for the classmates I met. For most of us, Valor provided our first ever touch of a musical instrument and our first-time trips that were miles and miles away from the San Fernando Valley, which until then was the only place I had ever known.

For every one of us, I know Valor offered the highest quality education any school in the San Fernando Valley could have ever provided. It gave us more than colorful classrooms, amazing teachers, and hot meals – it gave kids like me a better chance. Because at Valor, we had another route, another way, another plan for success in life. The years we spent at Valor are having a direct and dramatic impact on every year of our lives after graduation.

Vanessa Ramirez

Valor Academy Middle School

Valor Academy High School, Class of 2017

Bachelor's in Business, Cal State Fullerton, Class of 2022

“I know Valor offered the highest quality education any school in the San Fernando Valley could have ever provided. The years we spent at Valor are having a direct and dramatic impact on every year of our lives after graduation.”

– VANESSA RAMIREZ, Valor Academy High School Alumna

Bright Star Schools 20th Anniversary Gala





YOUR INVESTMENT TRANSFORMS

Possibilities into realities.

At Bright Star Schools, we believe every child is a worthwhile investment of our time, talent, and love. Not only because they deserve a strong education, but also because our world needs good people. We need future generations of educated, well-adjusted adults who will lead our communities through challenges and into peace and prosperity. That's why we developed unique core values to guide us as we serve these specific communities:

- **Integridad** means to be the best versions of ourselves, to speak our own truth, and to advocate for those whose voices are not heard.
- **Ubuntu** means our humanity is shared, that we value kindness, and that we support one another to become the people we strive to be.
- **Kohyang** means hometown and encourages us to build meaningful connections and strong community ties, because our hometowns are integral to our identities.
- **Growth** means having a mindset that allows us to achieve excellence and gain fulfillment through our pursuit of learning and development.

We believe we have created schools that offer a transformational experience.

Today, you too can transform society by helping transform the educational lives of thousands of students in our community. Make your own investment in these children and make our world a better place.

Visit brightstarschools.org/donate

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