

Date: December 23, 2025
To: City of San Pablo (COSP) Youth, School, and Community Partnerships (YSCP) Staff
From: Mayte Cruz and Rachel Maas, HTA Consulting
RE: Scholarship Pilot Program – Year 3 Evaluation Findings

Background

In April 2022, the City of San Pablo’s Council earmarked funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to establish the San Pablo Scholarship Pilot Program (SPP). This scholarship pilot program was launched in 2023 and will run through 2026, awarding \$1,000 scholarships to San Pablo young adults pursuing higher education or careers in the trades.

The primary goals of implementing the scholarship pilot are to:

1. Provide financial support to City of San Pablo youth with their post-high school education and career training.
2. Reach as many students as possible, with the understanding that San Pablo youth have faced extraordinary circumstances and hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Evaluate the program to understand the impact of the scholarship pilot and analyze possible future city-initiated funding mechanisms for a permanent scholarship program.

The SPP is overseen by the Community Services Department’s Youth, School, and Community Partnerships (YSCP) Division. Core responsibilities of YSCP staff include strategizing outreach and dissemination efforts, reviewing and selecting scholarship recipients, and organizing a scholarship award ceremony for the recipients and their families.

In January of 2025, the SPP opened its scholarship application to launch its third scholarship cycle. One notable change this round was the addition of the San Pablo Economic Development Corporation (SPEDC) as a partner to support the YSCP Division in implementing the pilot. SPEDC is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization closely partnered with the City whose work centers on workforce services, business education and support, financial empowerment coaching, and first-time homebuyer services.

This memo summarizes the work of YSCP and SPEDC in implementing the scholarship pilot this year and presents findings from our evaluation activities. It concludes with recommendations for program leadership to consider as next year marks the pilot’s final year.

About the Evaluation

In line with the goals of the pilot, the YSCP Division contracted HTA Consulting (HTA) in 2023 to conduct the evaluation of the SPP to assess its implementation and impact. HTA is conducting a mixed-methods evaluation, drawing on quantitative (e.g., survey and programmatic data) and qualitative data sources (e.g., focus groups with staff, scholars, and parents/ caregivers; and open-ended survey questions).

The learning questions outline below are guiding the evaluation. These questions were organized into four key categories: 1) Scholarship Selection and Requirements; 2) College and Career Readiness; 3) Trades/Workforce; and 4) Scalability.

Scholarship Selection and Requirements

1. How should scholars be selected? Should eligibility criteria be widened or narrowed?
2. What are the requirements for the scholarship application? Have there been any challenges regarding scholarship requirements? What have they been and how have they been addressed?
3. How do we reach students most in need? What are best practices for promoting the scholarship with these students?

College and Career Readiness

4. How do families currently get information about postsecondary opportunities? What programs have helped families the most in getting ready for college?
5. How do family responsibilities impact youth postsecondary pursuits?
6. Partners: What does engagement with West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) or individual schools look like? What services do schools provide? What kind of tutoring do students need? What gaps are present in college and career readiness?
7. What resources, services, and opportunities should the scholarship support?

Trades/Workforce

8. What trades/workforce should be included in the pilot? What certificates, trades, and other programs are youth interested in?
9. What does engagement with trade organizations, schools, or labor unions look like?

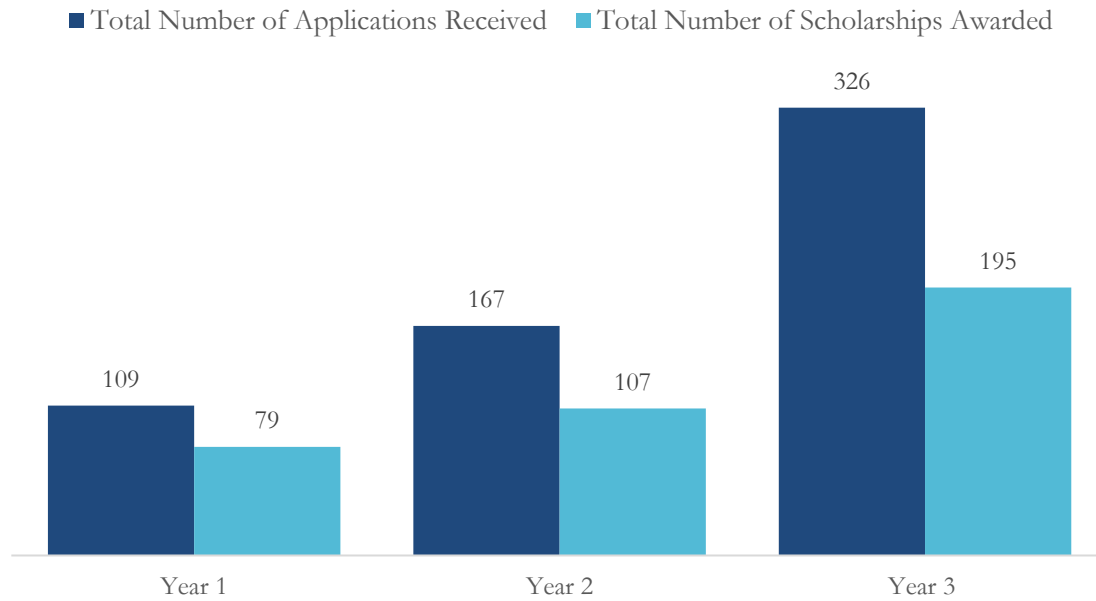
Scalability

10. How can the scholarship be scalable? What are other sources of funding support?

Scholarship Applications Received and Awarded

Since its launch, the SPP has seen steady growth in the number of scholarship applications received and the total number of scholarships awarded (Figure 1). Between years two and three, the pilot experienced a substantial increase in the volume of applications received, nearly doubling from 167 to 326 applications (or a 95% increase). SPP also increased the number of scholarships awarded, from 79 the first year to 195 during year 3. While not all scholarship applications meet eligibility criteria, the City receives more qualified applicants than it can award. Therefore, SPP prioritizes awarding first-time recipients over returning applicants who have already received a scholarship through the program.

Figure 1: Number of applications received and awarded, Years 1-3



Source: City of San Pablo 2022-2025 programmatic data

The significant growth in applications can be attributed to the program’s effective outreach efforts. In years one and two, YSCP collaborated with staff from high schools in West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) to share information and deliver workshops to students on the application process. They also partnered with the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) staff; canvassed the community to distribute flyers and laminated posters (e.g., at grocery stores, schools); and engaged youth-serving organizations and Contra Costa Community College. Building upon these existing outreach strategies, YSCP expanded collaborations with Voler, a public relations (PR) and marketing firm in year three, thereby strengthening its visibility by providing schools with laminated posters with a QR code to the application; tabling at more than 20 community events (e.g., school resource fairs); leveraging social media with City, SPEDC, SPPD and other partners; multiple SPEDC appearances on Radio El Sol; engaging 22 building trades to disseminate and – with the support of SPEDC’s marketing consultants, disseminating short videos in English and Spanish that played to social media algorithms, and a billboard was placed on the Lytton Casino LED Highway billboard overlooking Interstate 80. Five banners were also developed by YSCP and SPEDC in English and Spanish and displayed in high-traffic areas: two at the intersection of Market and Rumrill, one at the Rumrill Sports Complex, one at Davis Park, and one at a community center. These new outreach strategies seem to have had a direct impact on the increased application numbers, as 89 first-time applicants reported learning about the scholarship through a banner or poster (see Table 1).

Table 1: How applicants learned about the scholarship program (Check all that apply), Year 3

	First-Time Applicants	Renewal Applicants
Banner or poster	89	17
Friends or Classmates	74	23
School College and Counselor	65	12
College and Career Fair	56	8
College is Real	45	23
Teacher	45	9
Scholarship Workshop	38	11
Social Media	37	17
Richmond Promise	34	13
Email	31	17
Other	27	20
EAOP College Adviser	21	11
Event	19	2
School Club	5	0
Puente/Puente MaS	2	0

Source: City of San Pablo 2025 Scholarship Application Data

Highlights

The pilot program approach allows the City to gather feedback from program participants and program staff annually. Community feedback is integrated into improving service delivery while maintaining fidelity to the San Pablo Scholarship Program Pilot design.

Program leadership and staff from YSCP and SPEDC highlighted the following three areas of success this year:

- **Strengthened marketing strategies.** During the first two years of the pilot, YSCP staff used various marketing and outreach strategies to disseminate scholarship information widely in the community. This year, YSCP honed its marketing strategies, continued connecting with key partners (e.g., community colleges, EAOP, high school administrators, etc.), and, with SPEDC's support, expanded the pilot's visibility in San Pablo. SPEDC's expertise in marketing and branding was an asset to the team. They leveraged an existing contract with a PR and marketing firm (Volter), plus existing media relationships, to do a press release, post on multiple social media platforms, and develop short videos in Spanish and English. YSCP and SPEDC developed scholarship billboard ads in English and Spanish for the scholarship. As one YSCP staff member put it: *"Having an extra partner at SPEDC really helped this team amplify the message out to the community, because they're really adept and experienced with marketing and getting it out there."*
- **Notable increase in applications.** The pilot received its highest number of applications in 2025, surpassing the total from years one and two combined. YSCP led outreach efforts to promote the scholarship at high schools, Contra Costa College, and college and career fairs. They increased the number of tabling events this year and scaled back the workshops, which

tended to have low turnout. SPEDC leveraged its existing relationship with the Contra Costa Community College District (4CD) to include the flyer on campus billboards. It hosted a career and hiring fair at which YSCP successfully tabled. Additionally, they supported YSCP's outreach efforts and joined them at several tabling events.

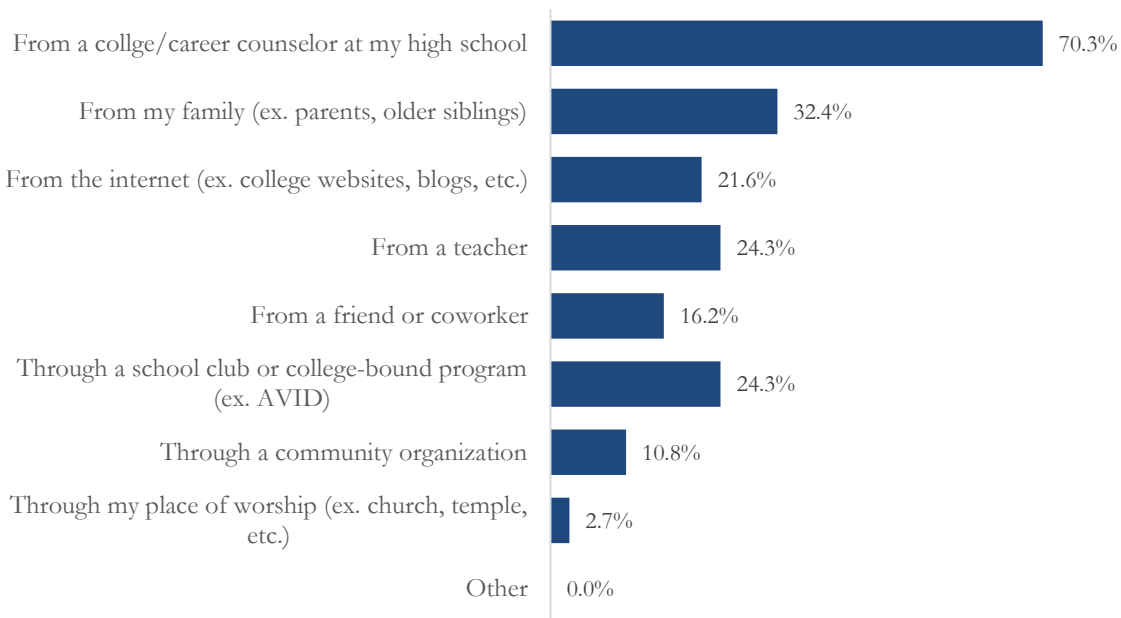
- **Successful scholarship ceremony.** Since the pilot's inception, YSCP has hosted an annual scholarship ceremony to celebrate recipients and their families. This year's reception was the largest to date. YSCP and SPEDC planned a reception for over 80 scholars and their families. The event featured student guest speakers, as well as local, state, and federal government representatives. YSCP and SPEDC reported that the reception ran smoothly and was well-received. YSCP leadership shared: *"We do a lot of work behind the scenes for almost a year, and then we get to really meet and connect with the students, the youth that we're serving and their families. So that was a highlight and one that I think has kind of given us more momentum for this next year as well."*

Scholar Survey Findings

In Summer 2025, a survey was administered to first-time scholarship recipients from year 2. The scholar survey was open for six weeks – from June 23 to August 1 – and asked a range of questions about scholars' postsecondary experiences, including the types of programs they attend, how they chose their current programs, resources that might have helped them prepare for their schooling, and current family responsibilities. A total of 37 first-time scholars from year 2 completed a survey.

Scholars were most likely to report learning about their college/career options from a college/career counselor (70.3% of scholars indicated this; this was also the most common response in 2023-24); this was followed by "from my family" (32.4%).

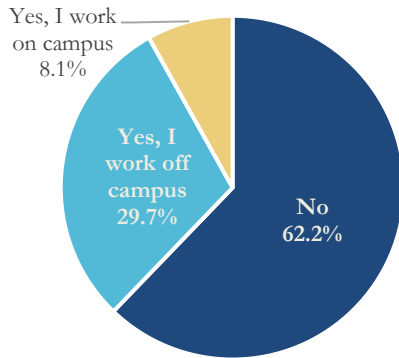
Figure 2: What ways did you learn about your options for college/career programs? Select all that apply (N=37).



Source: 2024-25 Scholar Survey

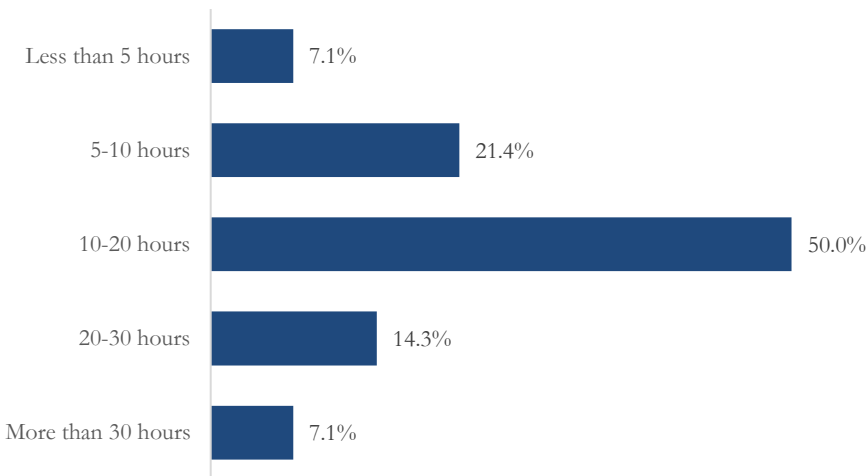
The majority of scholars (62.2%) who responded to the 2024-25 survey reported that they do not currently work while attending their postsecondary program. Nearly one third (29.7%) reported they work off campus, and a small percentage (8.1%) work on campus. Scholars who currently work were most likely to report that they worked 10-20 hours per week (50%).

Figure 3: Do you currently work while attending a college/career program? This can include work-study, internships, gig work, etc. Select all that apply (N=37)



Source: 2024-25 Scholar Survey

Figure 4: How many hours per week do you typically work (N=14)?



Source: 2024-25 Scholar Survey

The survey also asked scholars two open-ended questions:

- 1) In a couple sentences, describe how you decided on the college/career program that you currently attend. What were the main factors that went into your decision (ex. cost, location, interest)?; and
- 2) Is there anything you wish you would've known before you started your college/career program? What kind of resources might have made the transition into college/a career program smoother (ex. tutoring; mentorship; financial support; summer bridge program)? To answer this question, you may reflect on your full schooling experience, from

kindergarten through today (ex. resources or education provided in elementary and middle school are also relevant).

When asked to describe the main factors that went into their college/career program decisions, the most common deciding factors among scholars were:

- Location (25 mentions)
 - *“The main factor for choosing University of California - Davis for me was the cost of attendance and proximity to home.”*
 - *“I decided to pick UCI because of its location and new beginnings. I was looking for a change of scenery, and the beach and the area were beautiful and safe, and it was also affordable.”*
- Cost, finances, and financial aid (21 mentions)
 - *“I chose to go to CCC because I didn't want to be in major debt.”*
 - *“I chose my current university due to its affordability as well as its location and prestige. I was able to afford a school that I would both be able to attend without taking out any loans as well as a campus with great qualities.”*
 - *“I decided on this college/career based on cost as I am trying to save money as I want to become a lawyer and I know that will be expensive.”*
 - *“I decided on going to community college because it is cheaper and the location. I thought that by living with my mom I would save money in rent that I can use when transferring.”*
- Specific programs or coursework offered (17 mentions)
 - *“Growing up in a low-income [place] filled with majority POC it was brought to my attention that we aren't supported enough. In sociology I am learning how social systems shape us as a society. We look at it as a social issue not an individual one.”*
 - *“I chose the pre-nursing program at San Jose State because I've always had a passion for helping others and wanted a career where I could make a real difference in people's lives.”*
- Program or school reputation (15 mentions); and
 - *“UC Davis - it's closest to home and has a good engineering program.”*
 - *“UCLA is a public institution that pioneers students in their desired careers. To me, my institution was the perfect fit due to its large student body, strong academic reputation, and extensive resources.”*
 - *“I've always wanted to pursue a career in the arts, and while most prestigious art schools were financially unobtainable, CSULB offered an amazing art program for its status as a CSU.”*
- Specific career or academic interests (12 mentions); and
 - *“I've always liked cars and being able to learn about cars and working on them, so I really wanted to pursue [Automotive Technology] as a career.”*
 - *“I chose to study software engineering because I have always enjoyed technology, computers, and understanding how things work.... I chose this college because it offers more classes in my area of interest and gives me better*
 - *“I always wanted to work with women's health, so my dream is to become an OB-GYN sonographer. I am currently doing my prerequisites at my current college while preparing to transfer to a sonography school.”*

When asked what knowledge or resources might have helped with their transition into their college/career program, scholars noted the following helpful resources, from most cited to least cited:

- Financial resources, including both financial education (ex. Educational resources on student loans) and support (ex. Scholarships and financial aid) (11 mentions)
 - *“I wish I understood more on what taking loans meant as well as the cost of attendance. While many advocate for kids to attend, many overlook how much it costs and how much debt one would accumulate.”*
 - *“I guess some financial support to understand how everything would work in college, regarding payments, [would have been helpful].”*
 - *“I think applying for scholarships sooner would have been helpful in financially supporting my education.”*
- Mentorship or counseling (9 mentions)
 - *“I wish I had understood earlier that it’s okay to ask for help—whether it’s from professors, advisors, or classmates—because no one has it all figured out right away.”*
 - *“As a first-generation college student, I started my journey knowing little about college or how to navigate it and pay for it. A college counselor that guided me and that I maintained contact with would have been the most helpful.”*
- Academic support (8 mentions)
 - *“One thing I wish that I would've known before I attended college is the difference tutoring resources. I wasn't aware of the different tutoring services offered.”*
- Bridge programming (ex. Summer coursework before freshman year) (5 mentions)
 - *“When I started college, what helped me throughout the year was the Metro program. They helped me with any questions I had, gave me resources around the school, and provided tutoring to help support their students.”*
 - *“I feel that a summer bridge program at my college would have helped me. I would have been able to become more accustomed to the campus, resources, and staff and meet students.”*
- More awareness of college or career options (3 mentions)
 - *“I wish I would've known about more pathways requiring a degree, such as community colleges, trade school, etc. I think many students often get discouraged [from] pursuing higher education because 4-year institutions are heavily talked about.”*
- Help with identifying goals and planning coursework (3 mentions)
 - *“[I would've liked] help understanding what exactly it is I want to do with a college degree and a future career path. When applying to college, I was still figuring myself out and did not have a set goal of what I wanted to do.”*
- Awareness of campus resources (3 mentions)
 - *“I wish I knew where to find the quickest support, like tutoring or mentoring on campus.”*
- Time management support or advice (2 mentions); and
 - *“I’ve been told to focus only on my studies, [but] I found it more difficult handling my job. I’m still trying to find a balance that works for me between my work and studies.”*
 - *“I wish I had known how important time management and balance would be, especially when juggling school, sports, and personal life.”*

- Knowledge of academic requirements, including topics like how transfer credits work and the required exams for different program certifications (2 mentions)
 - *“Something I wish I would've known before starting this career is that it's got pretty difficult certification tests (ASE CERTIFICATIONS) and they require a good amount of preparation for them.”*
 - *“I wish I had known more about how the college system works, like how to plan classes, transfer, and choose the right major.”*
- Several students also noted they did not feel they needed any additional resources during the transition to their postsecondary program.

Scholar Focus Group Findings (2024-2025)

In June 2025, HTA also conducted virtual one-hour focus groups with scholars from year 3 where they were asked how they learned about the scholarship program, the application process, how they chose a postsecondary program, and their experiences in their postsecondary programs so far. Overall, fifteen scholars participated in the 2025 focus groups. The following findings emerged from the groups:

- When asked how they learned about the scholarship program, students most often reported that they learned of the program from family or friends. A few scholars had learned about the program through their high school college or career center, a couple of students had heard of it through their college counselor, and a couple had learned of it through Richmond Promise.
- When asked how to best promote the scholarship in the future, scholars suggested it should be promoted at in-person events, through pamphlets, and on social media—particularly Instagram.
- During discussion of the scholarship application process, **all** focus group participants described the application as a straightforward experience with minor hiccups. Minor issues with the application included FAFSA requirements, signature requirements, writing essay responses, and collecting proof of registration.
 - *“The essays were probably the most difficult portion. You had to come up with your own answer.”*
 - *“The only other thing I had trouble with [was] proof of registration. I was confused on what to submit and had to get help from someone who already applied.”*
- Scholars reported learning about their current college or career programs through high school workshops and fairs; college and career centers; college counselors; and college visits, including both visits to college campuses and visits from college representatives to scholars' high schools. A few scholars also mentioned learning about their current programs from EAOP teachers, family, friends, mentors, and “Google.”
- When asked what resources were most helpful to them while preparing for their college or career program, the most commonly cited resources were mentors, including college counselors; dual enrollment programs (college classes made available through their high schools); and college preparation programs like Upward Bound. One scholar each also mentioned athletic programs and financial assistance.

- Scholars focus group participants did not come to a consensus on what resources would have helped them prepare for their postsecondary programs, but they shared the following list: more mentorship and college counseling, more information on out-of-state options, more information on historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), earlier exposure to STEM fields, more local physical science programs, volunteer opportunities, financial literacy resources, and online technical education programs.
- Most focus group participants reported that they do not currently have family responsibilities while they attend school. However, a couple of students reported family responsibilities, including one scholar who stayed local to contribute to their parents' household and another scholar who helps run their family business.
- Finally, when asked how the COSP scholar program could best support future scholars, participants most commonly suggested financial workshops and general support through events and workshops that connect them to others. Other suggestions included: volunteer and networking opportunities, career roadmapping, additional financial support, and supplemental tutoring.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Through its ARPA funding, the scholarship pilot has successfully awarded 382 scholarships to San Pablo youth, including 195 scholarships in Year 3. The partnership between YSCP and SPEDC led to several accomplishments in its first year of working together, including strengthened marketing strategies, a substantial increase in applications, and a well-attended scholarship ceremony. However, both agencies had difficulty collaborating, primarily due to communication challenges and a lack of centralized tools to streamline information sharing. YSCP and SPEDC had either resolved these challenges or were working on solutions at the time of the focus groups.

Based on the findings presented in this memo, we offer the following recommendations below for YSCP and SPEDC to consider as they prepare to execute the final year of the program.

- **Create a shared tracker to manage scholarship applications.** YSCP and SPEDC can consider using Google Sheets, or a similar cloud-based tool, to streamline information sharing. Having a cloud-based tool can facilitate real-time sharing and provide immediate insights on a candidate's application status. Both agreed that this would be best practice.
- **Continue to provide relevant financial education to scholars.** Scholars expressed the importance of financial resources during their transition to post-secondary programs, including assistance with understanding loan terms, tuition payments, and planning their education expenses over time. Financial resources should focus on topics that are immediately relevant and actionable for students.
- **Provide scholar workshops on networking and identifying mentors.** Scholars, especially those who are first-generation college students, expressed the importance of being able to network and ask advice from mentors during the transition to postsecondary. However, scholars do not always feel comfortable or certain of how to network or cultivate mentor-mentee relationships. Workshops that help scholars build networking skills could help. The need for these skills may be even more pressing, as formative years of scholars' education were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.