



HORIZONS[®]
Sacred Heart University

NOT A SCHOOL. NOT A CAMP. A COMMUNITY.



2023 IMPACT REPORT

Inspiring Learning. Building Community. Nurturing Joy.

ABOUT HSHU

We are 100% Tuition FREE
That’s why your support is so important

MISSION

HSHU works to advance educational equity in Bridgeport. We create opportunities outside of school that inspire the joy in learning, prepare students for High School, and provide strong bridges to post-secondary success. We accomplish this by building a strong and enduring community network of families, businesses, and schools.

HSHU VALUES

We are heard

We are responded to

We can make mistakes and see them through

We are not alone in our hopes, dreams, and fears

APPROACH

HSHU provides year-round access and opportunity to underserved Bridgeport students in grades K-8. We emphasize academics, SEL and exposure to a variety of enrichment experiences.

PARTNERSHIP WITH SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY

SHU is a vital partner in our work and its beautiful 65-acre main campus in Fairfield County serves as an impressive backdrop for our summer program.

A YEAR-ROUND PROGRAM WITH PURPOSE

HSHU offers a top-notch immersive summer experience and opportunities to connect with students and families throughout the year including:

- After School Club
- Mentorships
- Tutoring
- Recreational Activities
- Community Events

IMMERSIVE SUMMER EXPERIENCE

The summer program runs for 6-weeks Monday through Friday for students in kindergarten-8th grade. It typically begins the last week of June and runs through the first week of August. Students engage in rigorous, project- based academics, and enrichment activities including swimming, community service, community-building events, and field trips.

FROM THE ADMIN TEAM



Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.

- Albert Einstein

Dear Friends,

In today’s fast-paced, data-driven world, it’s easy to get caught up in measuring educational success solely by quantifiable metrics such as grades, test scores, or the number of extracurricular activities in which a student participates. While these metrics certainly have their place, they represent only a fraction of what truly matters in a young person’s development. The unique and nuanced insights of our community members ensure that we are responsive to the true experiences and needs of the people we serve. Their stories help us to understand the power of the HSHU community and impact of our program.

Einstein’s wisdom serves as an important reminder that impact cannot be measured by numbers alone. There are immeasurable qualities that play an equally significant role in shaping a person’s life and impact on society. These include essential skills like empathy, communication, adaptability, problem-solving, and teamwork. These invisible threads weave the fabric of a person’s character and determine their ability to navigate life’s challenges and contribute meaningfully to their communities. We believe that the essence of education goes beyond rote learning and standardized testing. It lies in nurturing essential qualities by cultivating personal growth and community belonging.

HSHU’s mission and educational philosophy set the stage for joyful learning. HSHU educators model curiosity, creativity, and a genuine love of learning.

By recognizing and nourishing the unique talents and potential in each child, Horizons empowers our students academically and sparks lifelong passion for exploration and self-discovery.

Together, we can continue to provide critical access to opportunities that nurture our students and empower them to shape a world that values not only what can be counted but what truly counts.

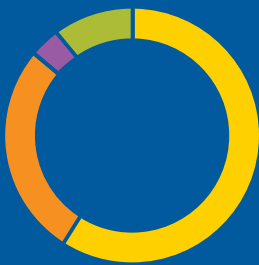
We invite you to join the Horizons at Sacred Heart University community as we prepare for an impactful 2024.

With tremendous gratitude and joy, ,

THE HSHU ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

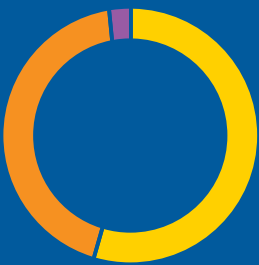
Ashley Freeman (Nechaev), Executive Director
Amanda Baez, Operations Manager
Mary Wanyo, Program Coordinator

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



RACIAL REPRESENTATION

59% Latino
26% African American
11% Other
4% Caucasian



SCHOOL REPRESENTATION

55% Public
41% Catholic
4% Private



176 SCHOLARS

TEACHER TO STUDENT RATIO: 1 TO 4



WITH THANKS FROM HSHU STUDENTS & PARENTS



I was introduced to the Horizons program through a family member. I was truly amazed with all the wonderful things Horizons has to offer, especially with the summer program. My son woke up every day excited to go to Horizons, he always had something interesting to talk about in his days. He bonded with children and the staff made him feel full of love. We love it here!

- **Danielle** HSHU parent, embracing 1st grade son Dimitri



The impact Horizons has on me is that they help me with anything I am struggling with, and they help break down my challenges to help me better understand. You can rely on the teachers, there is a good level of respect. Overall, Horizons is just great.

- **Jimena**, HSHU 8th grade student



Horizons has helped my family in so many different ways and continues to help people in the best way that they can. The values are so important to know and learn. Horizons makes you feel safe, welcomed, and supported. It gives you the confidence you need to go through life. Me personally, I couldn't ever imagine myself and how I would be without Horizons. I've been in Horizons since I was in kindergarten and now, I'm a sophomore and Horizons helped me go through the hard times. My family could never be more grateful for all the help and support we have from Horizons.

- **Frida**, HSHU high school student with Alvaro, HSHU 6th grade student and mom, Maria



HSHU has impacted my sons, giving them a new sense of maturity and social skills to be better friends, understand others, and be more responsible members of a community. HSHU seeks to grow healthy children through parent involvement, Social Emotional Learning, creating community, and allowing children to be active and invested in their own education. They are academically and socially more equipped to advocate for themselves.

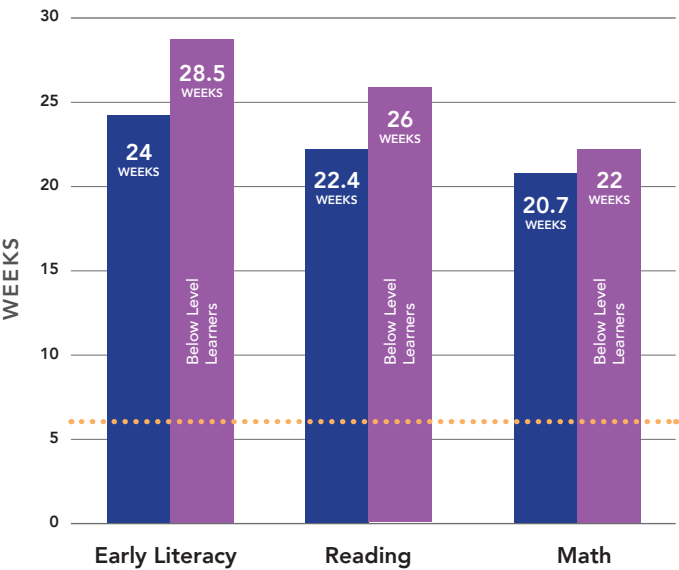
- **Keisha**, mother of HSHU 5th grade student Keko and HSHU 4th grade student Reko



A YEAR ROUND PROGRAM WITH IMPACT

176	Number of K-8 students
8	Additional students in 2023!

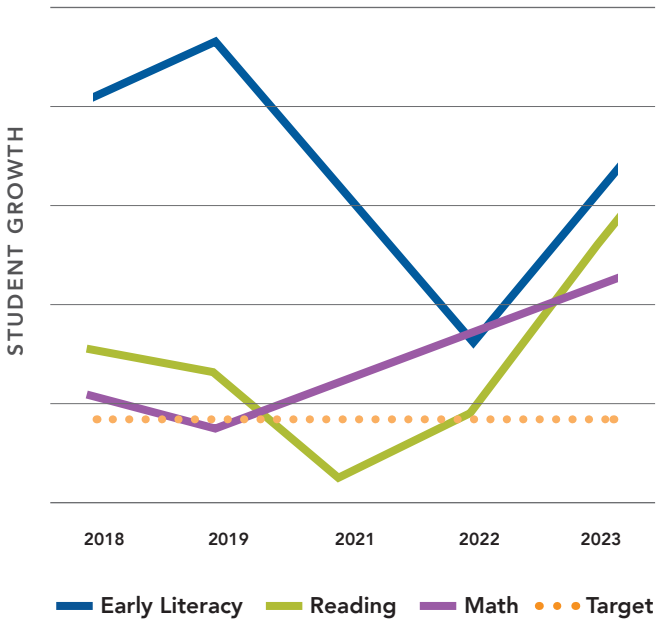
HSHU SUMMER ACADEMIC GROWTH



GROWTH GOAL: 6 WEEKS

Source: STAR- Cleaned by Horizons National

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON SUMMER LEARNING ACROSS HORIZONS NETWORK



In 2023, the percentage of students at or above grade level rose to 31%. However, despite the increase, results are still considerably lower than pre-pandemic percentages. These scores indicate that many students have still not recovered fully from the disruption in schooling.

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

Roderick Porter
Chief of Police, City of Bridgeport



...the impact that HSHU has on the children of Bridgeport is one of opportunities. The opportunity to experience and be exposed to exciting educational and enrichment opportunities that they might not otherwise be exposed to in their regular schools or home environments. When you contribute to the enrichment of young people's lives and provide a quality, well-rounded education such as the one at Horizons at Sacred Heart University, closes the opportunity gap and makes our community better.



Maureen Ruby DMD, PhD, EdD
Endowed Chair of Social, Emotional & Academic Leadership,
Department of Educational and Literacy Leadership,
Isabelle Farrington College of Education & Human Development,
Sacred Heart University



Among the many rewarding experiences of being at SHU is collaborating with Ashley Nechaev and the Horizons team in their inspiring labors of love. I am consistently in awe of the program and its accomplishments. I am impressed with the deep intentionality, reflection, rigor, and professionalism that are the hallmarks of Horizons SHU. Horizon scholars are an amazing community - invested in helping to create each others' tomorrows - in a context of friendship, learning, and a zest for life. I am blessed to learn and grow with HSHU!



Craig Haen PhD, RDT, CGP, LCAT, FAGPA
HSHU's Childhood Trauma Expert



By supporting K-8 students from historically marginalized populations through their comprehensive summer program, as well as a long-term relationship with their families that includes after-school programming and family workshops, HSHU provides an invaluable community for children and caregivers who might otherwise be overlooked. Their trauma-responsive educational approach sets a foundation that will contribute to important outcomes related to the acquisition of academic skills and social/emotional learning. Likewise, by engaging teachers in thinking differently about their role and approach in working with these young people, Horizons has the possibility of effecting change beyond their walls in those teachers' classrooms during the traditional academic year.



The pivot from a 9-session Saturday model to a full-scale school year program, with weekly touch points at After School Club, has transformed and strengthened the HSHU community. The bond between HSHU families and staff has amplified, making our community partnership stronger than ever. In addition, we have been able to extend our community engagement to SHU college students, offering volunteer opportunities and building connections.

- Mary Wanyo, HSHU Program Coordinator



Spend 5 minutes walking through the halls at Horizons at SHU and you will see, hear and feel the mission in action! Every student is growing and thriving - whether they are improving in math, becoming a more confident reader, competing in one of our swim meets, or learning from a Bridgeport community leader, the joy of learning and growth is palpable.

- Alisa Ryan, HSHU Board Member

BRIDGEPORT IS AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO

BRIDGEPORT CENTRIC CURRICULUM

Integrating local Bridgeport culture, history, and natural resources into the curriculum, learners not only gain a more profound sense of belonging, but also develop a strong sense of community stewardship. This approach not only enhances academic learning but also nurtures a sense of responsibility and community engagement, ultimately preparing students to be informed, responsible citizens with a deep connection to their surroundings.

I used to think my neighborhood was just where I lived, but when I started learning about my own community, I found out it's like a big puzzle. The people, the parks, and the history are a part of it and make our community pretty interesting. It makes me feel like I am a part of something bigger.

– Luis, HSHU 5th grade student

COMMUNITY PROJECT

In 2023 our annual community project invited learners to investigate the leaders whom Bridgeport schools are named after. Through this work we distilled the critical attributes of each leader and examined their social and emotional journey.



COALITION BUILDING

Collaboration between non-profits, community-based organizations, and schools is essential for supporting youth development. It maximizes the efficient use of limited resources and ensures a wider range of comprehensive services. This allows for the sharing of expertise and best practices, resulting in a stronger coalition of organizations to meet the multifaceted needs of young people.

Equity in education continues to be a priority for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging practitioners. HSHU demonstrates prudence in addressing this through their engagement with community conversations. One example is through the Defining Us film screening and panel discussion, where HSHU provided a platform for community discussion and strategy building on the issues of race, equity, and education.

– Maurice Nelson, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Sacred Heart University



A Powerful Network of Community Partners

	★
★	★
★	
	★
★	★
★	
	★
★	

★ Bridgeport Based Businesses

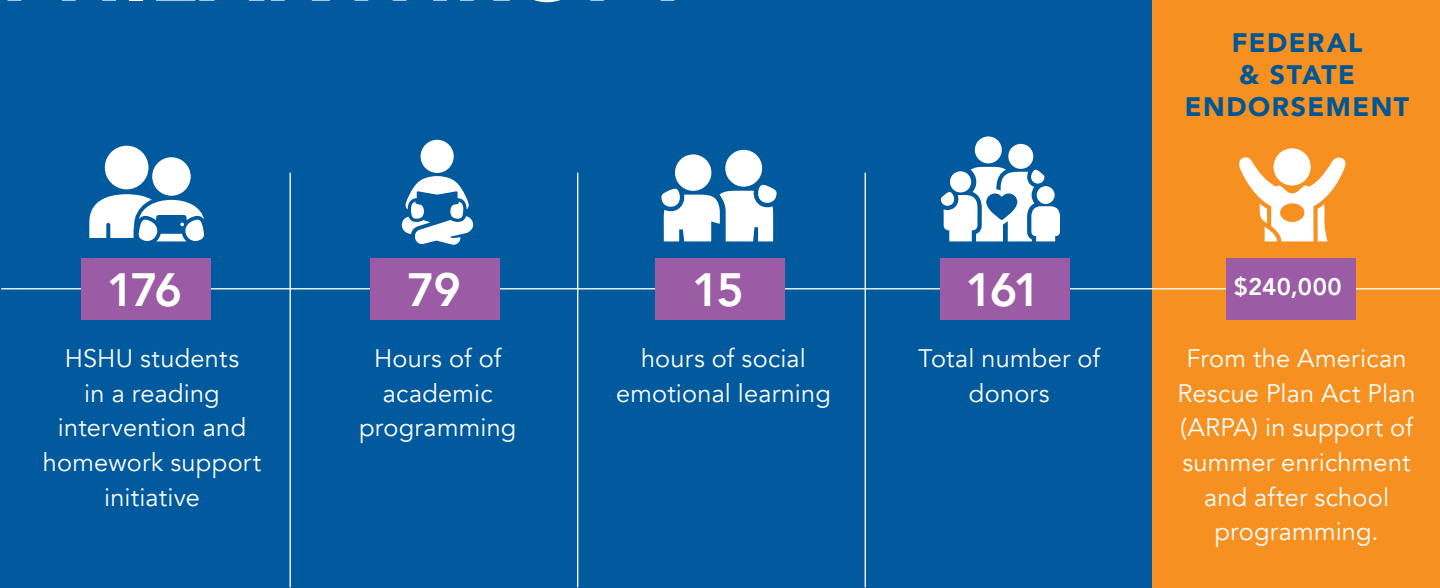
BRIDGEPORT NEIGHBORHOODS

HSHU works to build collaborative relationships with schools to recruit students and teachers to join our community.

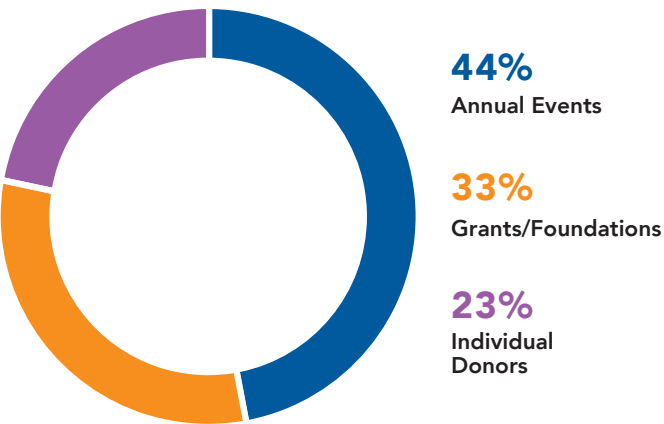
11 PUBLIC SCHOOLS

4 PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

THE IMPACT OF YOUR PHILANTHROPY

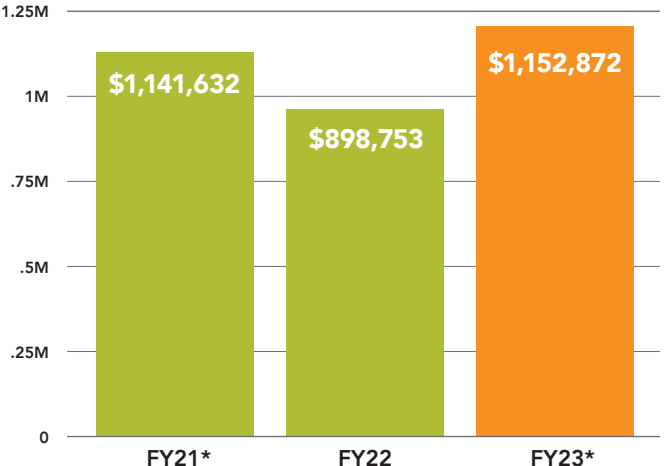


HOW SUPPORT WAS GENERATED*



*Percentages are from FY23

ANNUAL GIVING



* Due to weather 2 golf events occurred in this fiscal

“Horizons’ program left a lasting mark on the lives of the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI) children that attended. Through learning to swim, they discovered the power of conquering their fears and embracing new challenges. It wasn’t just swimming they mastered; it was the friendships they made that truly changed their lives. In the depths of the program’s welcoming community, they discovered hidden talents that uplifted and supported them. As they ventured beyond their comfort zones, they discovered personal growth, connection, and self-discovery that will forever shape their lives.”

– Lauren Kilcourse, CIRI community partner

HSHU TEACHERS AND STAFF

A RESEARCH-BASED RECIPE FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Research shows that 4 factors consistently influence student achievement regardless of race or zipcode:

- 1 Small school & class sizes
- 2 Combining academic and social-emotional learning
- 3 Rigorous curricula
- 4 Highly qualified teachers

Of these factors, highly qualified teachers—teachers who have experience and access to high-quality professional learning, is the most significant. HSHU commits to the growth and ongoing learning of educators. This summer, HSHU Staff had over 30 hours of professional learning and coaching.



“Growing up in Bridgeport, no one ever talked about social emotional learning. It is foundational to the program at Horizons. SEL helps our scholars develop the skills and mindsets they need to succeed in school and life. By integrating it into our curriculum, we foster a culture of community, collaboration, passion, joy, and resilience. We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to discover their potential and realize their dreams.”

– AJ West, Horizons SEL response team



HONORING OUR CHAMPIONS: LEGACY HEROES

Inaugural Frank Mori Award of Excellence in Education

Frank Mori was a long-standing board member, a true champion of HSHU, and held a deep belief in education. An HSHU educator will be nominated annually by their peers to recognize excellence in education. The award recipient is an educator who lives the HSHU community values and advances educational equity. This year our staff nominated **Aramis Lopez** to be the recipient to honor Frank’s legacy.



Grace Rodriguez Endowed Fund

Graciela Maria “Grace” Rodriguez was a dedicated mother, attorney, athlete, and philanthropist. After her passing in September 2022, Grace’s family and friends created the Grace Rodriguez Endowed Fund in support of Horizons at Sacred Heart University, a program near and dear to her heart.



FUTURE EDUCATORS



Horizons has wonderful administration and mentor teachers that helped me out so much along the way. I always felt supported and saw myself grow as a teacher during my time at Horizons!

– John DeRosa, Teacher, HSHU



I want to be an educator to make a difference in this community. As a young African-American man there are many stereotypes that I have had to confront. A lot of black youth are misguided, I have seen the impact of this on my friends and I feel like I can make a difference by playing a leadership role in the lives of others. Growing up in a tough city, I want to show my students that they don’t have to settle for less. At Horizons I have learned how to coach students up rather than bring them down. This was the highlight of my experience at Horizons and something I will take with me.

– Xavier Giddiens, Future Bridgeport Teacher

THE IMPACT OF GREAT LEADERSHIP



The leadership demonstrated by the Horizons Sacred Heart University Board is supportive and encouraging. The board has been open minded and courageous allowing our organization to meet the evolving needs of educators, families, and students. Together—the board, administration and families—are steering a course that will propel HSHU to new heights, making dreams a tangible reality and forging a more equitable Fairfield County.

– Ashley Freeman (Nechaev), Executive Director, HSHU



This multiyear and multifaceted program is how we make our greatest impact and change the life trajectories of our Horizons students. It directly reflects SHU’s mission to embrace social justice and to prepare students to make a difference in the global community.

– John J. Petillo, President, Sacred Heart University



Great staff and board leadership at each Horizons affiliate is essential to realizing our mission of advancing educational equity for young people. The Horizons at Sacred Heart University team consistently demonstrates an unwavering commitment to building a joyful, equitable community where students learn, grow, and create their own path toward a future filled with choice and possibility.

– Lorna Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Horizons National

TOGETHER WE ARE #APOWDERFULWE

HORIZONS AT SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Tom Forget, PhD	Frank Mori (deceased)	Daniel Thomas
Leah Gambal	Barbara Omohundro	

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Help HSHU remain a 100%
tuition free opportunity for
Bridgeport students.

THERE IS NO HSHU WITHOUT YOU!

Learn more about the program and invest today!

