



**RISE TOGETHER EDUCATION**  
PALO ALTO HIGH SCHOOL

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

**Rise Together Education**

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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of *Rise Together Education*,

The year 2021 began with the Covid pandemic continuing to devastate our society. The situation was especially challenging for our *Rise Together Education* scholars whose families struggled to pay rent and utilities. We were fortunate to be able to continue to offer resources, mentorship and scholarships because of countless volunteer hours and your financial gifts. Our scholarships are often used for small hurdle expenses such as dorm deposits, textbooks, transportation to campus, Wi-Fi access, and, frankly, meals. These expenses add up and can cause a student to drop out of college.

Mentoring is a core pillar of the success of our organization. At any given time, we are usually working with about 60 scholars. Board Member and Mentorship Chairperson Kimberly Schwan continues to work on a formal structured program to support our scholars. This year we welcomed Amy Friedman and Grainger Marburg who joined RTE as Mentors. We are also grateful for the continuing partnership with *Palo Alto University* to provide counseling services to our students. Board members Pallavi Homan and Samuel Vasquez (a former RTE scholar) organized virtual social peer networking activities and online workshops for students who felt the isolation of the pandemic. Tricia Dolkas of *Kickstart Career* volunteered time providing personal career coaching and advising students on how to write effective job cover letters, resumes and social media posts.

The energy and commitment that our Board of Directors brings to the organization is powerful. I am grateful for all the care that the board gives to the students. This past year board members provided a place for a student to stay during winter break, assistance with college transfer applications, and help finding part time jobs and internships.

With your partnership and generosity, we will continue to help close the educational and wealth gap and support these hardworking and determined Palo Alto High School graduates reach their dreams of obtaining a college degree.

Sincerely,

*Dawn Billman*



# OUR MISSION

Rise Together Education is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to improving college graduation rates by providing support and financial resources to low-income Palo Alto High School students who have been accepted to 4-year colleges or 2-year community colleges with a direct transfer agreement.



# ABOUT RTE

*Rise Together Education* (RTE) is a Palo Alto High School-based nonprofit that provides multi-year mentoring and financial support to eligible low-income Paly students attending 4-year colleges or 2 year-colleges with a direct transfer agreement. Our long term commitment to these students starting in high school is unique to our organization. Our students must meet the criteria of being eligible for the federal [\*Free or Reduced Lunch Program\*](#) for Palo Alto Unified School District, which is equivalent to an annual income of less than \$48,000 per year for a family of four. If a student is low-income and is accepted to college, then RTE provides financial aid, resources, one-on-one mentoring, networking opportunities, workshops, individual coaching, community building and free mental health counseling through Palo Alto University. **We are a nonprofit organization that helps deserving students get to college and through college.**

Working with Paly staff, RTE first identifies potential scholarship recipients during their years at Paly. Just prior to graduation, RTE begins working with these students and continues to work with them through college and after graduation. In 2021, 98% of RTE's expenses were used for scholarships to help students with financial aid gaps. The number of students and the amount of scholarships RTE is able to provide is dependent upon fundraising efforts; however, our financial goal is to one day be able to provide scholarships up to \$5,000 per year for each student. We aim to have enough money raised to provide all of our current students scholarships through four years of attending college. As of Fall 2021, we provide \$2,500 per year to each 4-year college student and \$1,000 per year to each 2-year (community college) student. After our community college students complete their associate degree, we provide \$2,500 per year to attend a 4-year college for up to two additional years. As of fall 2021, we have provided scholarships to 79 students.



# HISTORY

**June 2015:** Laura Marcus-Bricca started a GoFundMe page for Stephanie Estrada.

**November 2015:** RTE granted IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.

**June 2016:** RTE welcomed 12 Paly graduates into its first cohort.

**Fall 2016:** Spirit Week Store created as first RTE fundraiser (ran for 3 years).

**Spring 2017:** Held joint fundraiser with the Paly Choir.

**March 2018:** Hosted Paly's Got Talent fundraiser.

**March 2019:** RTE holds its first Gala fundraiser, bringing in about \$32K

**March 2020:** RTE cancels its gala fundraiser due to Covid-19

**May 2020:** Dawn Billman is voted in as President.

**August 2020:** Alumni Stephanie Estrada and Sammy Vasquez join RTE Board as Co-Directors. RTE began applying for grants from foundations.

**May 2021:** Online exercise-a-thon fundraiser and raised \$50,000. Established a formal process for applicants through Paly's Scholarship Committee. Recruited new committed community Mentors.



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dawn Billman - President  
Danielle Haas-Laursen, JD, PhD - Vice President  
Nancy Kawakita, MBA - Treasurer (until 6/21)  
Nam Kim, JD - Treasurer  
Deanna Chute, MA - Secretary  
Pallavi Homan, MBA - Alumni Liaison  
Kimberly Schwan - Mentorship Chairperson  
Tida Violante, DrPH, MPH - Grants & Development Chairperson, Operations  
Greer Stone, JD - Director (until 8/21)  
Elizabeth Mueller - Director  
Stephanie Estrada - Director and Peer Mentoring Co-Chairperson  
Samuel Vasquez - Director and Peer Mentoring Co-Chairperson

## MENTORS

Kimberly Schwan  
Amy Friedman  
Grainger Marburg

## ADVISORS

Laura Marcus-Bricca, Co-Founder and Past President  
Kimberly Diorio, Co-Founder and Past President  
Michael Sullivan, Co-Founder and Past Treasurer

## STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

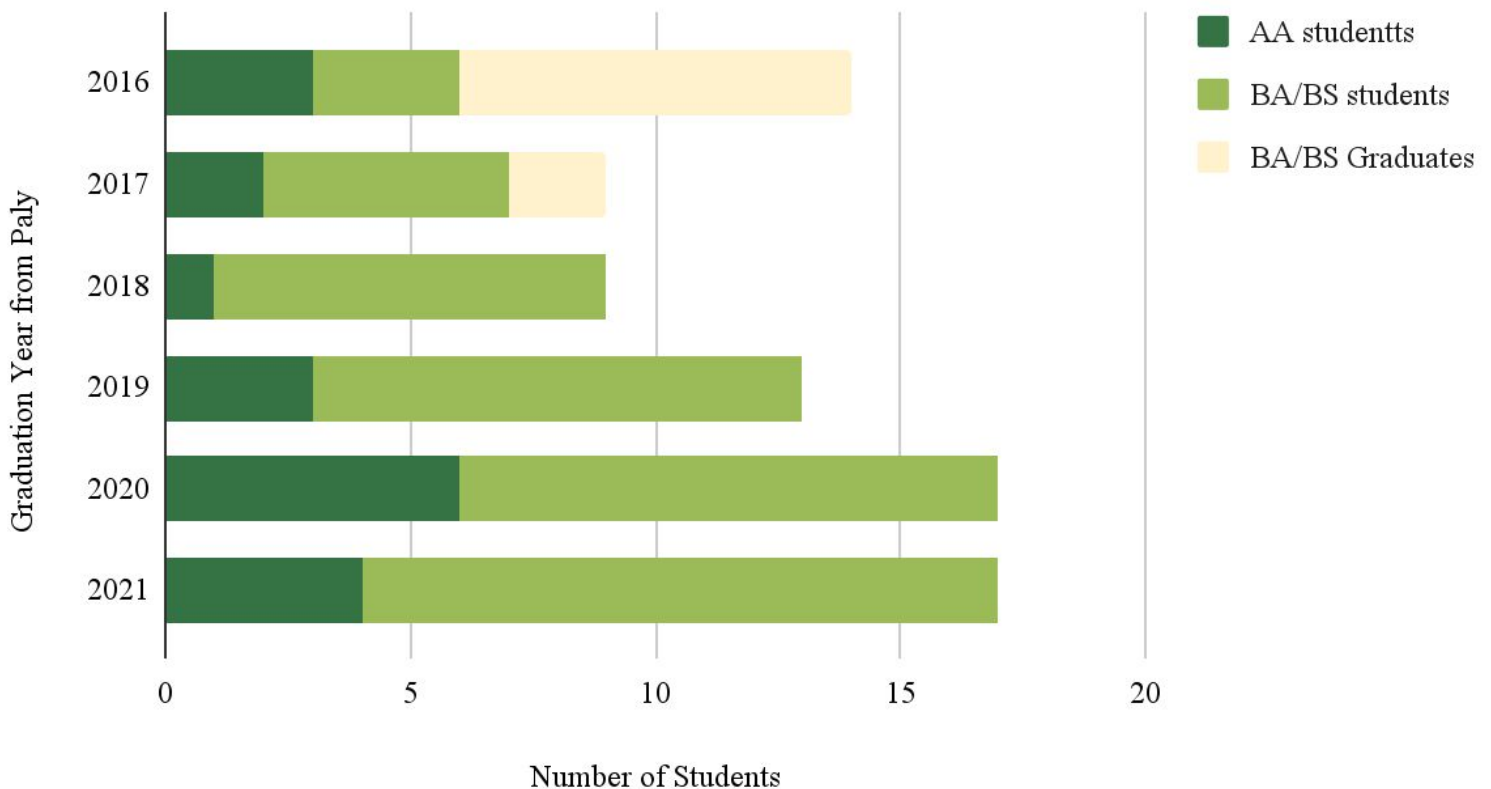
Ines Lengrand - Class of 2023  
Maya Mukherjee - Class of 2023  
Nadia Sorburg - Class of 2024  
Ben Szeto - Class of 2022

# SCHOLARS & DATA

Similar to other years, 16 of 17 scholars in Paly's Class of 2021 are the first generation in their families to attend college. Not only do they bring pride and joy to their families, but have made their teachers and staff at Paly very proud as well. The number of students whom we supported from each Paly graduating class are listed below.

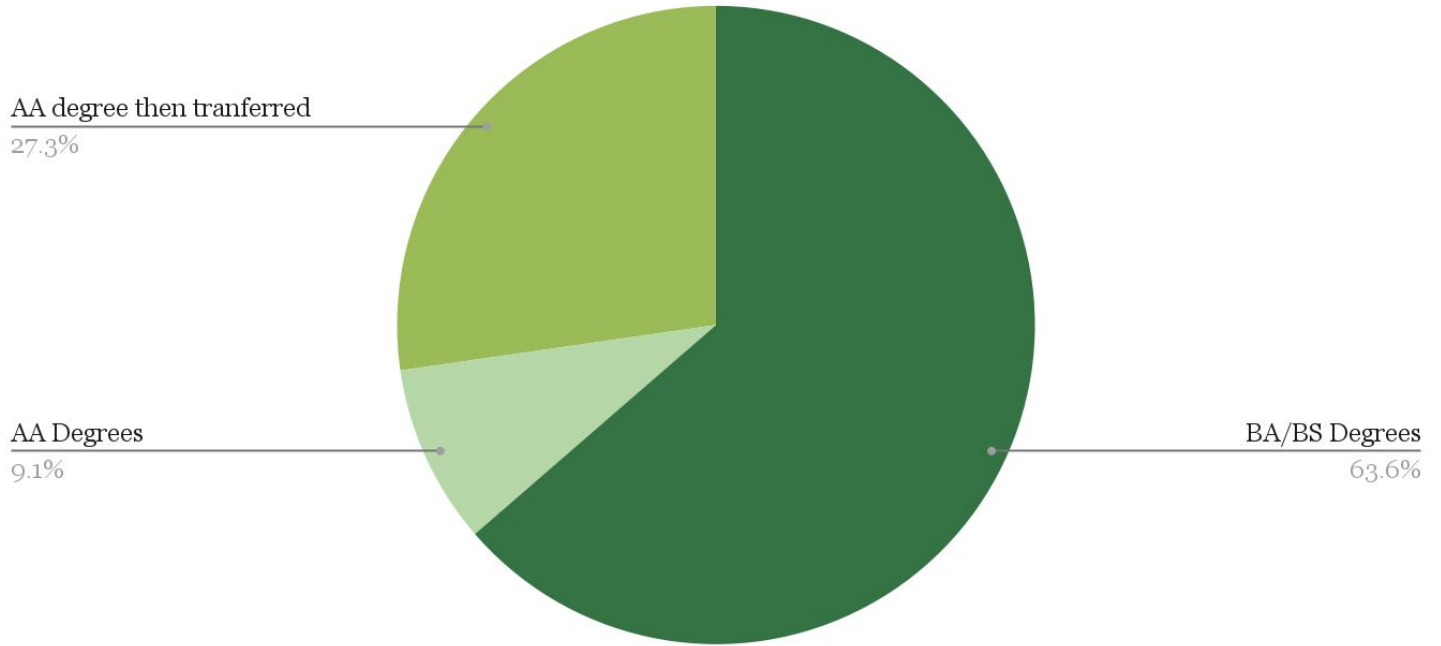
Data shows that first generation students tend to have a much lower college retention rate but our RTE scholars have overwhelmingly proved themselves. They graduated with a bachelor's degree in a timely manner, one graduated with a master degree and two are in graduate schools. From Paly Class of 2016, 8 have graduated with a bachelor's degree, 2 are still pursuing their bachelor's degree and 2 completed associate degrees.

Matriculation & Graduation in Fall 2021

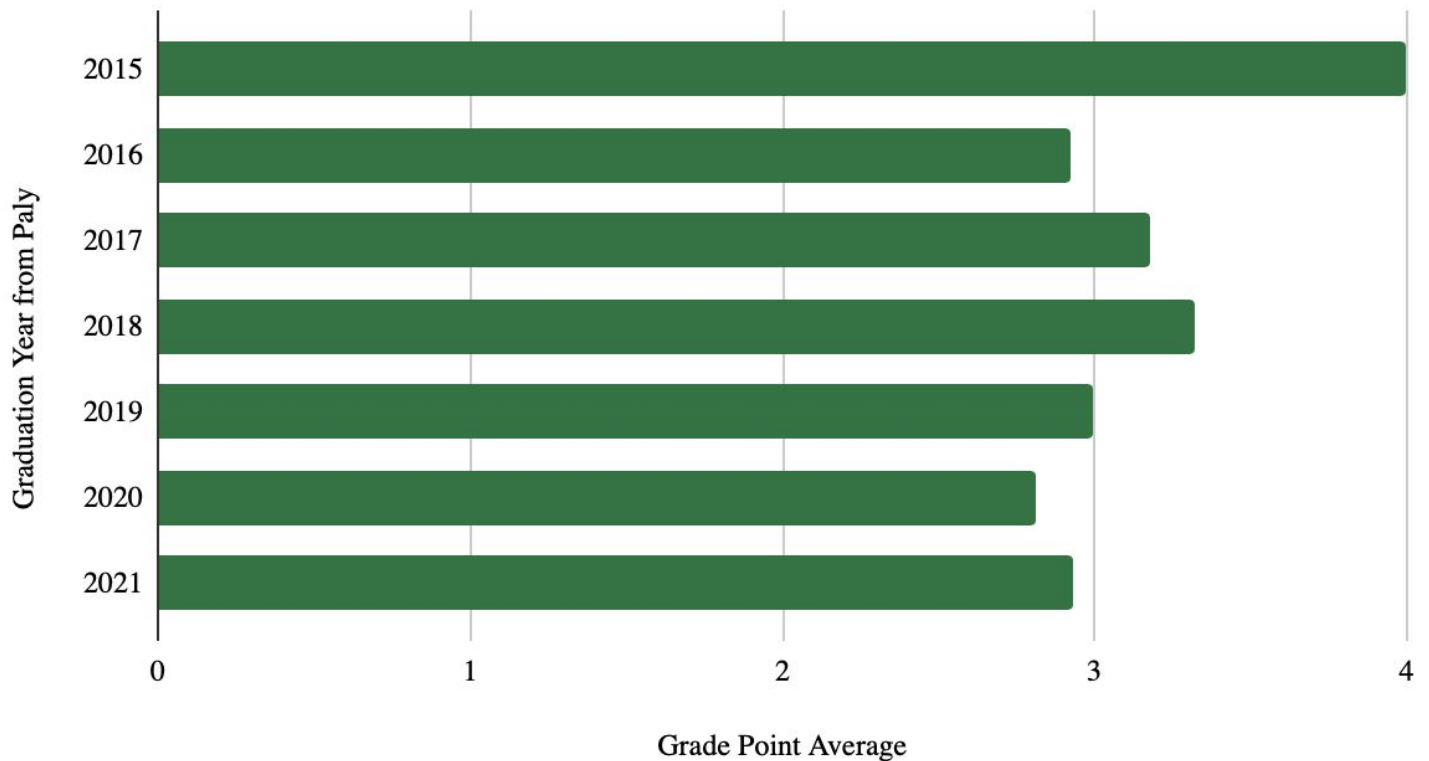




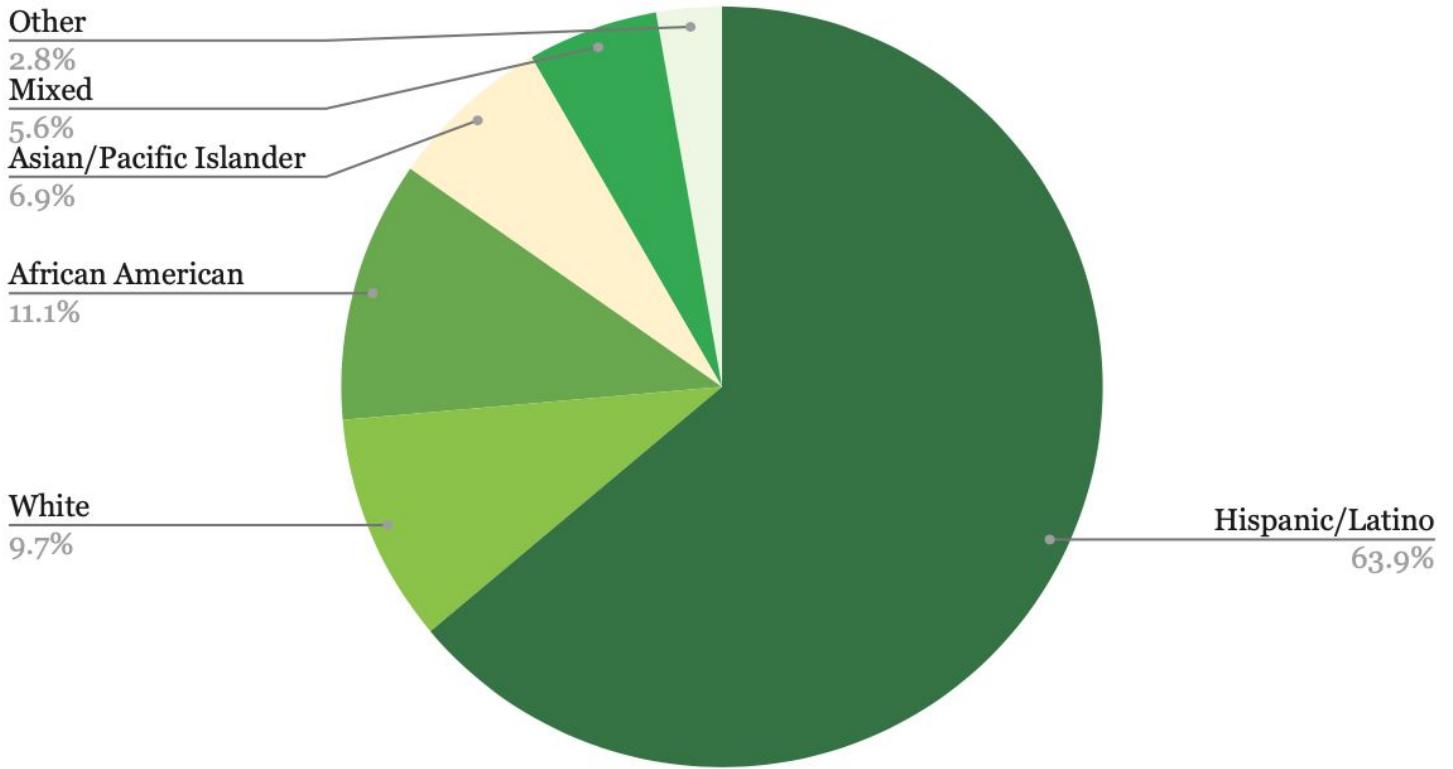
## 22 College Graduates from 2015-2021



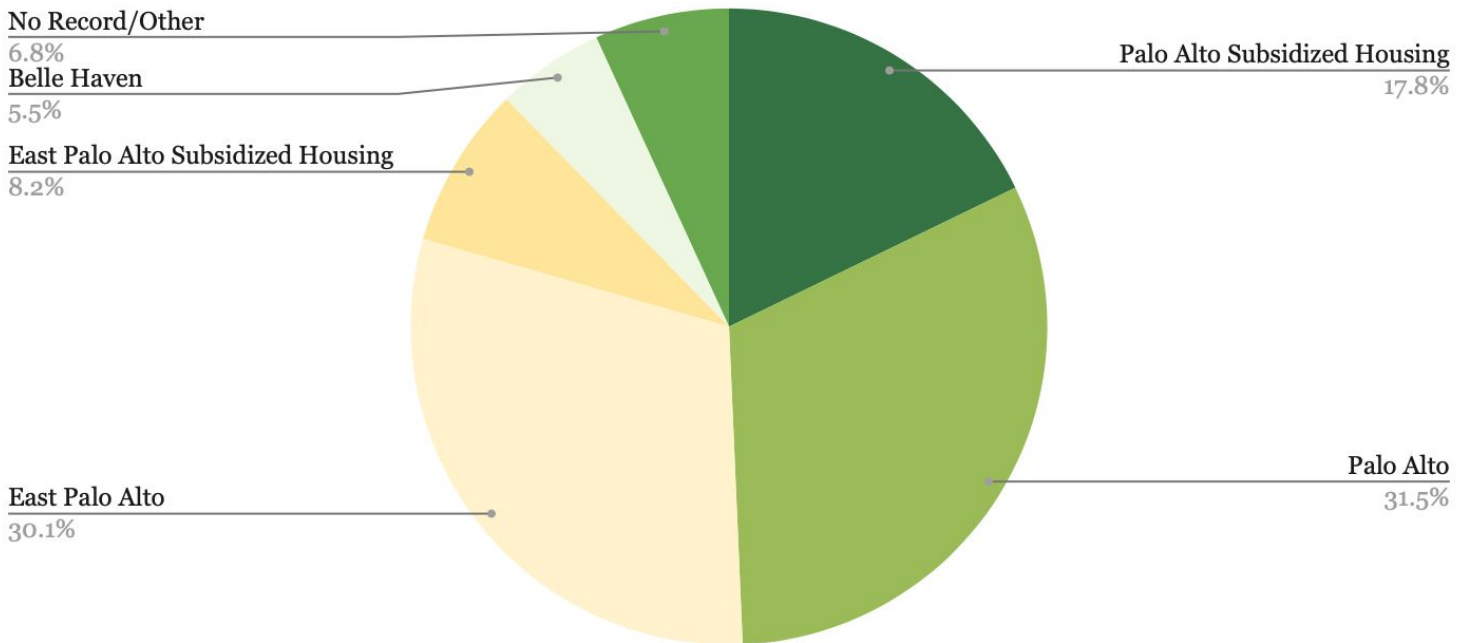
## Cumulative Grade Point Average, December 2021



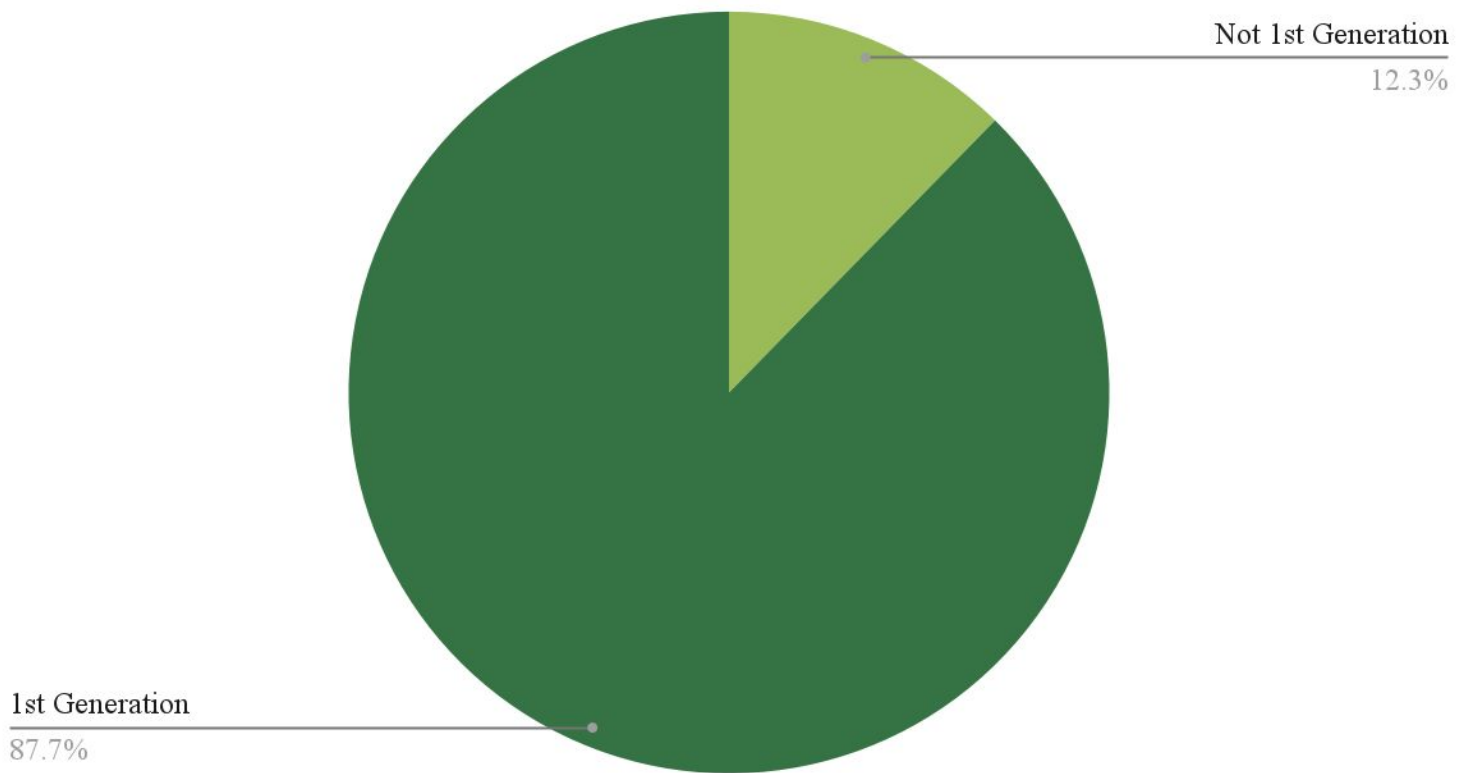
## Race & Ethnicity



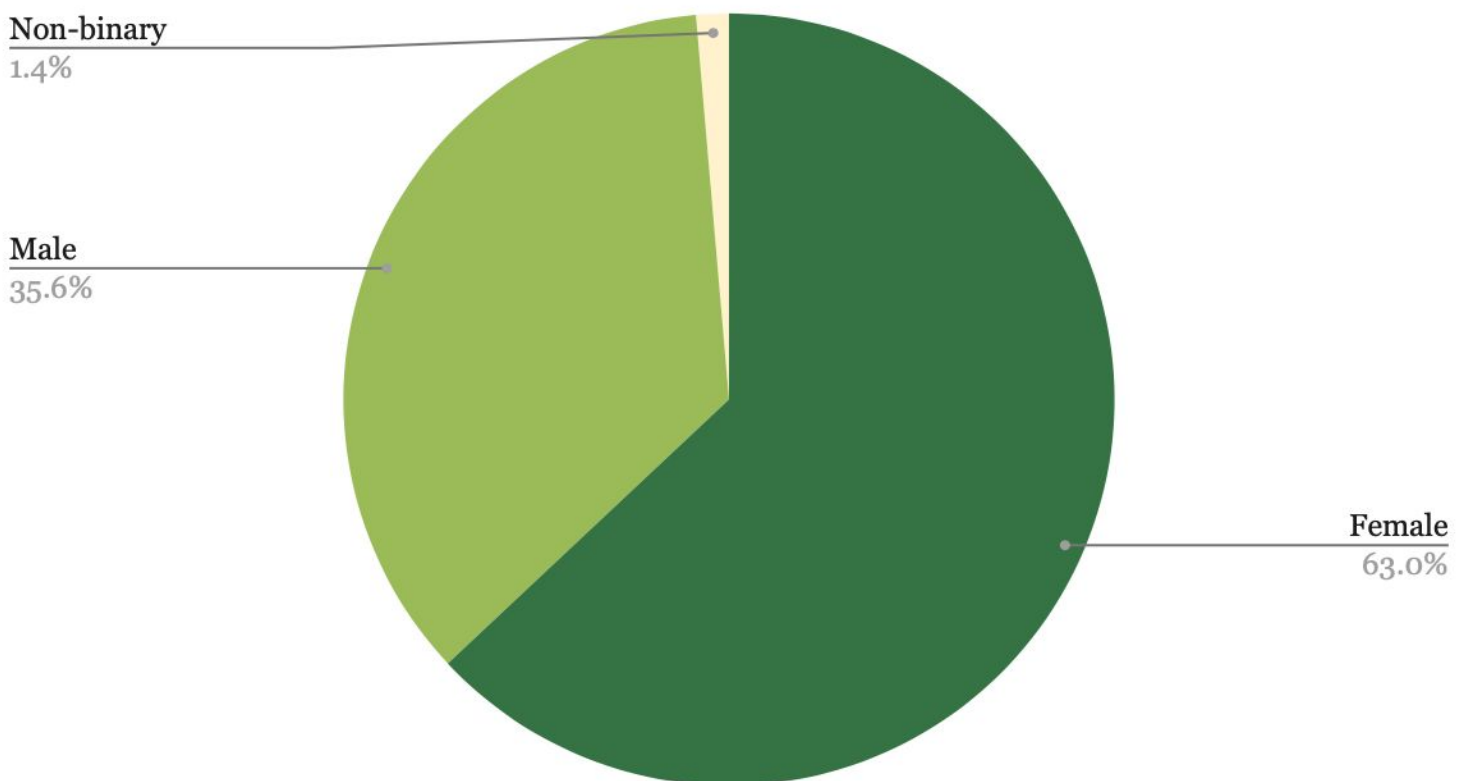
## Place of Residence During Grade 11



## Scholarship Recipients by Parental College Status



## Scholarship Recipients By Sex





## SARA AGUILAR

**Sara Aguilar** (Paly Class of 2017) graduated from Menlo College with a degree in marketing in 2021. As a collegiate wrestler, Sara was named an All American two times in three seasons.

### **What has been the best part about going to college?**

The best thing about college was creating lifelong connections and having the opportunity to continue my education and do so while competing in collegiate wrestling. I learned that I could overcome setbacks and thrive amidst the immense stresses of life, academics, and athletics. This last semester I took a course in Business Ethics which I loved. Throughout the semester, there were many great guest speakers.

### **Has RTE made a difference in your decision to pursue a college degree? If so, how?**

Paying for college was a big concern for me and my father, who is unable to work. Thanks to RTE, I had financial support throughout my four years in college.

### **Did any adults help/support you in the process of getting to college? How?**

I had a few mentors in high school who helped me through the college application process. With their help and guidance, I decided what college was the best fit for me.

### **Did RTE make a difference in helping you decide your post-Paly plans? How?**

RTE not only provides financial support, mental health service information, workshops, and other essential resources to students, but also helps to connect graduates with prospective employers. Students can contact an RTE member for guidance, allowing the transition from college to the workforce to be less stressful.

### **What do you want to do after college?**

After college, I want to explore career options in business and design. I plan to stay involved in the wrestling community and coach locally. In the future, my goal is to open a branding agency. I also want to open a nonprofit to support the fight against human trafficking.



# ELY CALLEJAS

**Ely Callejas** (Paly Class of 2019) graduated from Foothill College with a degree in Economics in 2021. She transferred to **UCLA** within two years, a phenomenal feat!

## **What is your major/what are you interested in studying?**

I am an Economics major, but I want to go into Political Economics, specifically.

## **What is one of your favorite subjects/classes this Spring? Why?**

I've enjoyed taking philosophy courses. This quarter I'm taking western philosophy and last quarter I took ethics. Both have been really interesting courses, looking at different philosophers' ideologies, how they've framed our society and continue to influence us today.

## **What has been the best part about going to college?**

The freedom and opportunities I received in college were a refreshing and positive change after high school. Besides taking a few required courses, I've loved having the option to take any class to explore my interests.

## **Has RTE made a difference in your decision to pursue a college degree? If so, how?**

I've always had plans to pursue a degree from a four-year institution. However, the support and other success stories from low-income and first-generation students sent out by RTE have been motivating and helpful to keep me actively working towards it. RTE has allowed me to keep my options open when it came to transferring. If certain schools don't provide sufficient aid, the financial support from RTE is there to help me so I can choose the university that is best suited for me and I'm not completely limited by the financial aspect. RTE has been very supportive of my decision to go to community college first and then transfer. At first I was pretty unsure about attending Foothill but looking back, financial and emotionally, it was the best decision I could have made.

## **Did any adults help/support you in the process of getting to college? How?**

My parents, of course, have always been supportive of my educational journey. While they weren't able to help me in terms of academics, their support has been more than enough to keep me working to be the best that I can be.

## **Do you have an idea of what you want to do after college?**

I would like to work to push for equitable economic development or to examine urban economics and the allocation of funds in urban cities towards resources that build communities stronger. I really just want to help people and give back. Social impact is my driving force and I'd love to build a career around that.



## MICHEL-ANGE SIABA

Michel-Ange Saba (Paly '17) initially attended Humboldt State University after graduating from Paly. He then transferred to Stonehill College in Massachusetts because of its reputation in Criminology. In 2021, Michel-Ange earned a bachelor's degree in Criminology and a minor in German Studies and another minor in Sociology. He graduated *Magna Cum Laude* and has been inducted to the Edwin H. Sutherland Criminology Honor Society.

Michel-Ange competed in Track and Field events at Stonehill College and holds many school records. He was also named Northeast-10 Conference Man of the Year for 2021. See the video honoring Michel [here](#). Additionally, he was a 2021 Fulbright Scholarship semifinalist and Presidential Merit Scholarship recipient.

While Michel-Ange was home during the summer after the murder of George Floyd, he helped to spearhead advocacy in the Palo Alto area. Additionally, Michel-Ange is involved in peer mentoring with current RTE students.

Michel-Ange is currently working as a cognitive-behavioral therapist with incarcerated people in Norfolk, Massachusetts. In January 2022, he will continue his stellar educational career by attending Suffolk University Law School which is located in Boston.



## ANDREA MOLINA

Andrea Molina (Paly '17) graduated from San Jose State University this summer *Cum Laude*. She earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology and minored in Theater Arts. We are very proud of Andrea who is currently in a Master's degree program in Counseling and Guidance at SJSU. She is working on credentialing for Pupil Personnel Services as well as for Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor. She is interested in the socio-emotional development aspect of counseling.

# Colleges & Universities of Our Scholars

- Amherst College
- Allegheny College
- California Institute of Technology
- California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
- California State University, Channel Islands
- California State University, Chico
- California State University, Los Angeles
- California State University, North Ridge
- California State University, Riverside
- Chapman University
- College of San Mateo
- Cosumnes River College
- De Anza College
- Emory University
- Foothills College
- Humboldt State University
- Menlo College
- Notre Dame de Namur University
- Northeastern University
- Pasadena City College
- Pitzer College
- Purdue University
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- San Francisco State University
- San Jose State University
- Saint Louis University - Madrid
- Santa Barbara City College
- Santa Monica College
- Stonehill College
- Sonoma State University
- Stanford University
- The University of New Orleans
- Tufts University
- University of California, Davis
- University of California, Merced
- University of California, Santa Barbara
- University of California, Riverside
- University of Connecticut
- University of La Verne
- University of Redlands
- University of San Francisco
- University of Tennessee
- Whittier College
- Williams College





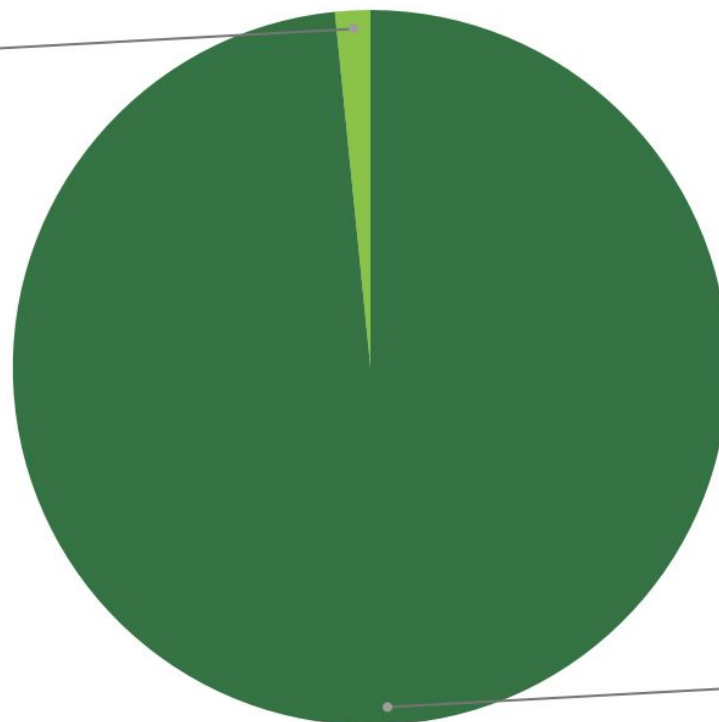
# 2021 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

As an all-volunteer board, *Rise Together Education* raised money from individuals, foundations, and businesses in the local community. We have spent the past six years establishing our program. We aim to spend 90% of the funds raised on scholarships.

In 2021, 98.4% (\$89,850 of \$91,303) were distributed to students as scholarship awards.

Revenue Expenses

Operation Expenses  
1.6%



Total Scholarship Expenses  
98.4%

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

We provided scholarships in the amount \$2,500 per year for four-year college students and \$1,000 per year for community college students (for the maximum of two years). We continued with these amounts in 2021 for all our scholars. At this level, we anticipate distributing roughly \$120,000 in scholarships in 2022. We are grateful for the support of our generous donors and supporters who have continued to provide our organization with their money, time and skills.

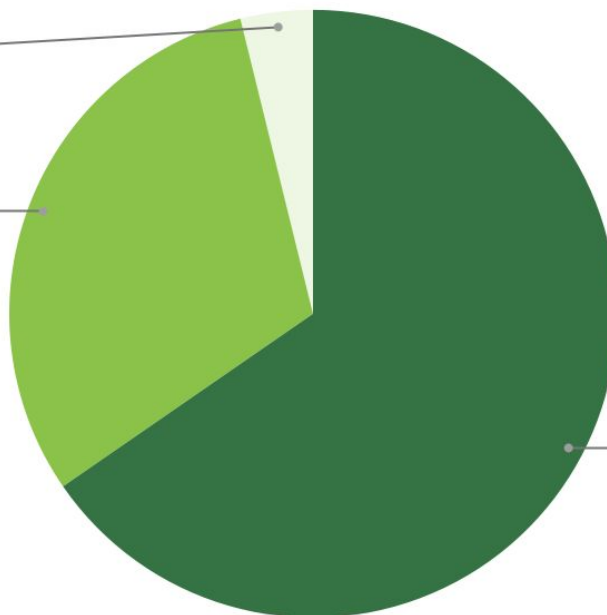
## Revenue Breakdown

Total Revenue: \$130,000

Event registration fees - \$5,000  
3.8%

Grants - \$40,000  
30.8%

Donations - \$85,000  
65.4%



# 2021 Awarded Grants

sereno  
**1% For Good**  
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

*The*  
**WOMAN'S**  
*CLUB of Palo Alto*

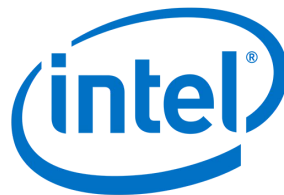


# 2021 Business Sponsors

## Event Sponsors



## Employee Matching Grants





## RTE IN 2022 AND BEYOND

Through our hard work helping RTE students and promoting our organization for the past 6 years, we finally feel like we have a foothold in the Palo Alto community. In December 2021, our scholars have earned 14 bachelor's degrees and 8 associate degrees (6 students transferred to complete their bachelor's degree). We anticipate that we will have 15 - 20 incoming scholars each fall using the established Paly Scholarship Committee to find the college bound students with the greatest financial need. As always, we are partnering with Paly's *College and Career Center* Counselors and sharing information with other similar organizations in the area to find more ways to help these students. During the pandemic, mental health was an important issue for our scholars. We will continue to work with *Palo Alto University* to provide mental health support for those who needed therapy. We will expand the peer mentoring program with the new college graduates and recruit more committed and qualified community members to be mentors.

We will continue to secure grants to diversify our income stream and ensure that we have sufficient funding to provide scholarships for at least two years into the future. We reached out to local foundations to apply for grants. We hope to be able to increase the amount of scholarship money in 2022 as inflation continues to climb. We want to expand networking with local businesses to provide career workshops, internships and jobs to bring our scholars back to work and live in our community once they have finished college.

Thank you for being a part of our mission to help more hardworking students like Sara, Ely, Michel-Ange and Andrea reach their dreams of successfully graduating from college!

**We would like to thank the  
hundreds of individual supporters  
who believed in our mission,  
provided time, encouragement  
and financial support.**

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