



The STARS College Network, a group of leading universities formed to ensure that students from rural and small-town America have the information and support they need to enroll and graduate from the college or university of their choice, is **doubling its membership to include 32 of the nation's most prominent institutions.**

In its inaugural year, the STARS College Network opened doors to higher education for **more than a quarter-million students.** The expansion this summer will add flagship state schools, historically Black colleges, Ivy League universities, and other selective institutions, spreading STARS's reach to more regions across the nation.

An estimated \$7.4 billion will fund STARS's mission over the next decade, which includes the financial aid provided directly by participating institutions to students, and expanded support for the initiative from foundations, non-profits and new funding from governmental agencies. Trott Family Philanthropies will build on its initial \$20 million gift that served to launch STARS with an additional investment of more than **\$150 million over 10 years in programs that prepare, recruit, and support rural students.**

This extraordinary growth follows a year in which STARS outreach connected with 1.6 million people, including students, families, educators, administrators, foundations, legislators, companies and other organizations. STARS institutions directly engaged with **more than 700,000 students, and more than 288,000 students joined the STARS network.**



**Visited 1,100**  
RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS  
**49 states**  
LAST YEAR



**\$7.4 billion**  
IN AID AND PROGRAMS  
FOR RURAL STUDENTS  
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JOINED STARS

## In its first year, STARS:

- Visited 1,100 rural high schools in 49 states to bring information about a wider variety of institutions directly to students and educators
- Gave prospective students and educators more opportunities to experience STARS campuses first-hand through free trips to visit colleges and summer programs that help prepare students academically and socially for college
- Provided monthly virtual panels with college admissions staff from Network schools, with topics designed to meet students wherever they are in their college search process
- Addressed math preparation gaps through a new partnership with Khan Academy and Schoolhouse.world that provides students with free courses and tutoring
- Partnered with local and national businesses to provide internships and job opportunities for the next generation of rural America
- Inspired additional philanthropic giving across the country and new partnerships with leading college access organizations including the College Board, Davis New Mexico Scholars, the Ayers Foundation, and Palouse Pathways
- Sparked national media coverage, academic research, convenings and policy conversations about how to enhance college access for rural and small-town students
- Advocated for federal, state and local legislation that would support rural and small-town communities

*“STARS’ first year demonstrated that there is an appetite and imperative for our nation’s leading universities and colleges to better serve the massive talent pool in our small towns and rural regions,” said Byron D. Trott, chairman and co-CEO of BDT & MSD Partners. “STARS and its affiliated programs are opening doors in higher education for high-achieving rural students they might not have found otherwise; and the students, campuses and our economy will all be the better for it.”*



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Students from rural America often face unique obstacles to attending college. While students in small towns and rural communities graduate high school at roughly the same rate as students in metro areas, they are only half as likely to graduate from a selective college or university.

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**STARS simultaneously addresses a variety of obstacles that contribute to this disparity.**

Because of distance and cost, college admissions offices may bypass small towns and rural communities. Students in those areas are less likely to encounter college-related ads or attend events on campuses.

College counselors in rural high schools are often overburdened, if the school even has a counselor. The average national caseload for rural counselors is 310 students, with a high of 574 in rural Michigan. This means that students may have less access to educators and college access professionals who have broad experience and familiarity with the full spectrum of college opportunities.

Importantly, these students may not think they can afford college. Many do not have the networks and resources to help them understand the financial aid and other support available to them.

By combining resources and committing to a plan to overcome those challenges, STARS member institutions help a wide variety of students at every step of their journey, whether they ultimately attend a STARS institution or not.

“Our STARS outreach helps us enroll students who bring the intellectual and experiential breadth and diversity that sparks learning and discovery. Both our institutions and their communities are better for that,” said Ronné P. Turner, Vice Provost for Admissions and Financial Aid at Washington

University in St. Louis. “These students have the opportunity to bring their knowledge and expertise back to their community in ways that drive innovation and economic development.”

Kasey Urquídez, vice president for enrollment management at the University of Arizona, a new member of STARS, was herself a first-generation college student from a rural town in Southern Arizona. She credits college outreach with opening her eyes to new opportunities. “By working together, we can reach more of those students than we ever could alone, and we learn from one another effective new ways of empowering and engaging students from rural communities and small towns,” she said.

*“Not only did STARS give me the opportunity to explore colleges I could only dream of in person, it gave me hope that schools like the University of Chicago actually care about my chance to go beyond the boundaries of my small town,” said Destiney Samare, a graduate of Oak Hill High School in Winthrop, Maine, who will be a first-year student at the University of Chicago this fall.*

## The new STARS member institutions are:

- Amherst College
- Auburn University
- Dartmouth
- Duke University
- Georgia Institute of Technology
- Southern Methodist University
- Spelman College
- Stanford University
- University of Alabama
- University of Arizona
- University of Arkansas
- University of California Berkeley
- University of Denver
- University of Notre Dame
- University of South Carolina
- The University of Texas at Austin

*“It is so inspiring to see the ever-growing ecosystem of partnerships, funding and institutional commitments to ensure that rural and small-town students have the widest array of educational choices, and that our institutions can benefit from all they have to contribute,” said Douglas Christiansen, vice provost for university enrollment affairs and dean of admissions and financial aid at Vanderbilt University and STARS co-chair.*

STARS founding members are Brown University, California Institute of Technology, Case Western Reserve University, Colby College, Columbia University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northwestern University, The Ohio State University, University of Chicago, University of Iowa, University of Maryland, University of Southern California, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Vanderbilt University, Washington University in St. Louis, and Yale University. STARS is led by the University of Chicago and Vanderbilt, and headquartered at the University of Chicago.

Some STARS members have well-established programs for rural students already and seek to build on and share that momentum. Others are creating a new focus on opportunity for rural students.

By highlighting the benefits of this work, the STARS College Network hopes to motivate other institutions, alumni, and philanthropists to increase their own efforts on behalf of rural students.

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**Research shows that college graduates from rural areas often return to their communities, so efforts to help rural students get the greatest benefit from higher education can create a virtuous cycle of support, success and giving back to the next generation.**

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## Partnerships are key to expanding impact and ensuring student success.

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STARS schools directly engage with the rootEd Alliance, a public-private partnership that helps rural students define and plan their paths to achieve career success and economic stability by placing dedicated college and career advisors in rural schools. Operating in 195 schools across Missouri, Texas and Idaho, rootEd has served 42,000 students to date, and collaborates with STARS to provide specialized support and training for rootEd advisors throughout the year. rootEd Alliance, launched in 2018, is made possible by a group of philanthropists convened by Trott Family Philanthropies.

STARS is expanding its efforts with Khan Academy and Schoolhouse.world to address math preparation gaps by providing students with free courses and tutoring. A new multi-year partnership with the College Board, which serves 7 million students each year, significantly expanding the scale and impact of STARS. As part of this partnership, College Board will provide \$300,000 in funding for the AP Rural Fellows scholarship program, which provides funding for AP teacher professional learning and development, launch new resources to better equip rural and small town counselors and AP teachers to support college-going, feature STARS successful models and practices at College Board national conferences that reach over 10,000 educators annually; and pilot new ways to support and recognize rural and small town school, teacher, and student achievement.



**rootEd**  
ALLIANCE



**Khan Academy**



**schoolhouse**

Students can learn more and participate in STARS programs at <https://starscollegenetwork.org/>. For media inquiries, please contact Katelyn Yoshimoto at [kyoshimoto@uchicago.edu](mailto:kyoshimoto@uchicago.edu).