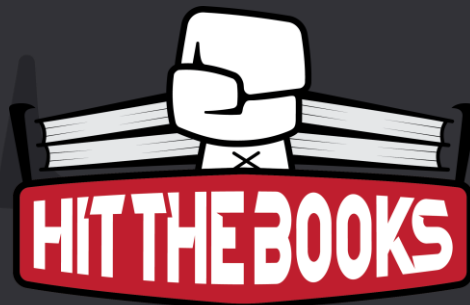


# 2024 Annual Report



EST. 2019

'Tough Times Don't Last, Tough People Do'

# Letter from the Executive Director



As I reflect on my first year as Executive Director of Hit the Books, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of pride, gratitude, and purpose. What an incredible journey it has been to serve this resilient and passionate Harlem community, where hope and determination radiate from every corner.

When I joined Hit the Books, I was drawn to its mission of bridging educational gaps and creating a safe haven for our children. This year, I witnessed firsthand the profound impact we have on young lives. Each student we serve has a story, a dream, and a spark that deserves to shine brightly. Together, we've made strides to ensure their potential is nurtured, their voices are heard, and their futures are filled with promise. I've seen students grow in confidence as they tackle challenges, both on the mat and in the classroom, embodying the very essence of perseverance and ambition.

This impact would not be possible without you—our supporters, partners, and **champions**. Your unwavering commitment has fueled our efforts and inspired us to dream even bigger. Because of your generosity, we've been able to provide free programming, expand our services, and ensure that no child is left behind. The trust you've placed in us is not taken lightly, and I am deeply grateful for your belief in the Hit the Books mission.

The Harlem community has shown me what it means to rise above adversity. Our families remain steadfast in their pursuit of opportunity and excellence. They remind me daily that change is not just possible but inevitable when we come together with purpose and resolve.

As we look ahead, I am excited to continue to build on this momentum. Our vision for the future is bold: to reach even more students, provide greater access to resources, and deepen the impact of our programs. Together, we will continue to nurture a generation of leaders who are not only academically and physically strong but also compassionate and empowered to make a difference in the world.

Thank you for being an integral part of this journey. Your support is the heartbeat of Hit the Books, and your partnership enables us to dream, act, and achieve. I am honored to lead this organization and to stand alongside you in this transformative work. Let us move forward together, with the same resilience, passion, and hope that defines this remarkable community.

With deepest gratitude and hope,

All the best,

Jhae Thompson

Executive Director

Hit the Books



Jhae Thompson  
Executive Director

It's surreal to be embarking on our 5th year of programming at Hit the Books. Never could we have imagined that the seemingly unbelievable idea of two, 23-year-olds starting a non-profit organization would turn into something that impacts hundreds of kids each year. We have had the privilege of serving so many unbelievable students and we have loved every minute of this opportunity. As we reflect on the past 5 years, we are so unbelievably grateful for everybody that has played a part in the Hit the Books story. To our students that show up every day eager to grow, to the family members that take them to programming and trust us with their development, to our staff that spends every day with our students no matter the circumstance, to our partners that work alongside us, to our board members that push us forward, and to our donors that entrust us to make a difference, we cannot say it enough: THANK YOU!

This past year in particular has been a special year for our organization. To sum it up, 2024 was a year of growth. We worked with nearly 200 students, a record and a testament to our goal of serving the Harlem community to the fullest of our ability. More importantly, we were able to have a deeper impact on those students, helping them along their path to success. We have re-tooled and expanded our staff and board, growing our reach inside and outside of our facility. We have come a long way and are proud of where we stand today. However, we are never satisfied and we have big plans for the year ahead.

If 2024 was a year of growth, 2025 is a year of sustainability. Our goal is not just to be a fleeting source of support for a select group of students. We strive to be an institution, a place that is synonymous with generational change in the Harlem community. In order to do that, we are prioritizing the fortification of our infrastructure in 2025. This means broadening our funding base, filling key staffing areas, and putting in place procedures that enable us to focus our attention on 'the work'. We believe these steps will position us for success in 2025, 2035, and beyond. As we look out into the year ahead, eager to face any and all challenges, we will need your help in doing so.

The first five years would not have happened without help from all of our stakeholders. And with you, our next 50 years of making positive change in our community is within reach. Thank you for everything you have done to help us to where we are, and thank you for everything you will do to help us get to where we are going!

Best,  
Zach Levy and Justin Haber  
Co-Founders of Hit the Books



Justin Haber  
Board Chair



Zach Levy  
Board Vice Chair

## Our Mission

Hit the Books (“HTB”) aims to **bring additional educational resources** to underserved communities through a sports-based development approach, with tutoring and mentorship at its core and mixed martial arts as the ‘hook’. HTB **serves as an after-school community center** to facilitate development and help make any and every goal achievable for its students.

## How We Will Achieve Our Mission

- We provide after-school educational programs, mentorship, and mixed martial arts classes to children in Harlem aged 6-13 to help students progress intellectually, emotionally, and physically.
- We expose our students to educational opportunities that may otherwise pass them by, enhancing the educational resources available to children in our targeted communities and fostering an environment of educational equality.
- We serve as a community within a community, where children feel safe and view the facility as a second home.

## Our Core Values

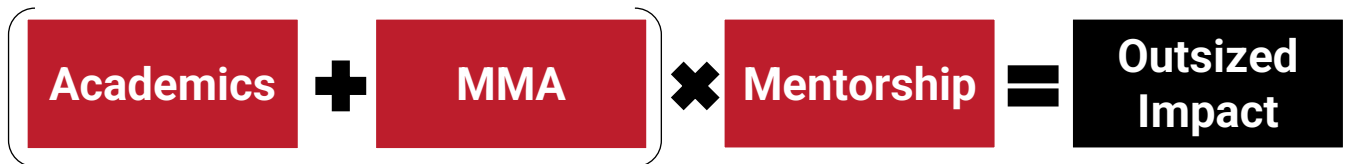
- Our members believe in a **commitment** to their academic goals and put the value of education first.
- Our members believe that they are capable, **resilient** and can bounce back from anything.
- Our members are **ambitious**, and they believe every opportunity can be achieved with a positive attitude, hard work and tenacity.
- Our members are **self-disciplined**. Focus and consistent practice lead to success—in the ring, and in all corners of life.
- Finally, HTB members are **compassionate**. They believe in being empathetic toward each other, their families, and other HTB members. They are champions for their communities and strive to make the world a better place.

# The Hit the Books Model

Hit The Books focuses on three Key pillars intended to shape our students' development: (i) Academics, (ii) Mentorship, and (iii) Mixed Martial Arts

Academics	Mentorship	Mixed Martial Arts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ HTB has a full-time staff focused on creating a positive learning environment and a tutoring curriculum, leveraging the iReady educational learning platform</li> <li>✓ HTB has recruited talented local high school students and graduate school interns to provide individualized instruction to students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ HTB employs passive mentorship, whereby the staff and tutors act as role models through their daily interactions with our students</li> <li>✓ HTB provides daily dinner for students to foster a communal experience and bonding amongst the students, tutors, and HTB staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Mixed Martial Arts encompasses Muay-Thai Kickboxing, Boxing, Wrestling, and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu</li> <li>✓ The benefits of martial arts include improvements in focus, discipline, self control, and coordination. At HTB, we have blended those benefits with mentorship that focuses on camaraderie, goal setting, compassion and work ethic</li> </ul>

Every facet of our program is intentional. It is designed based on extensive research on effective academic strategies and the benefits of an interdisciplinary (sports + academics) approach



Academic Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students feel neglected by their academic institutions</li> <li>▪ Students arrive at Hit the Books intimidated or disinterested in academics</li> <li>▪ The 'work' starts by motivating students to give academics another chance.</li> <li>▪ The lack of 'one size fits all' answers means progress takes time</li> </ul>

MMA Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MMA is a fun way to be active, making it intrinsically motivating</li> <li>▪ Unlike other sports, size doesn't matter in MMA. Proficiency is driven by hard work.</li> <li>▪ The ability to clearly see cause and effect (hard work = growth) translates to hard work elsewhere (i.e. academics)</li> </ul>

SEL Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Our core values are Commitment, Resilience, Ambition, Self-Discipline and Compassion</li> <li>▪ We weave these values into our programming at every level</li> <li>▪ This creates a culture within our facility that puts students in a position to succeed and is easily transferable to other areas of life</li> </ul>

Compound Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Our holistic approach ensures impacts are wide-ranging and lasting</li> <li>▪ Students are often initially motivated during MMA, which translates to increased engagement academically</li> <li>▪ 10% growth in a 5<sup>th</sup> grader's ELA score causes a 25% drop in their chances of imprisonment<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>

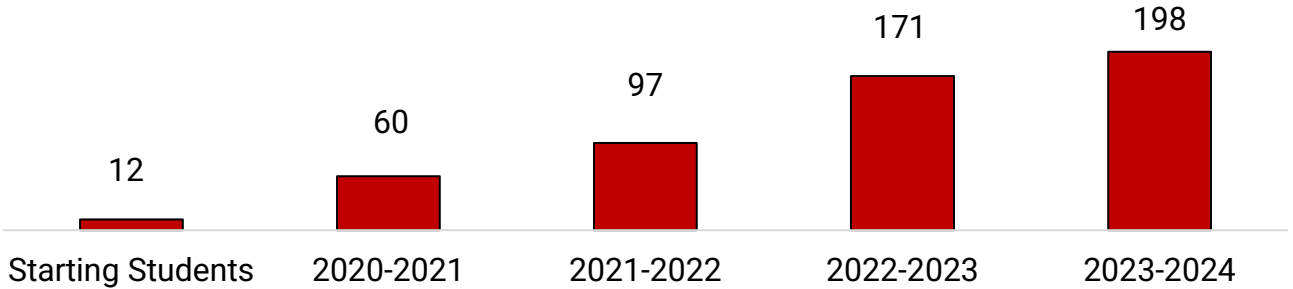
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/origin/ny/report.html>

# Organizational Growth

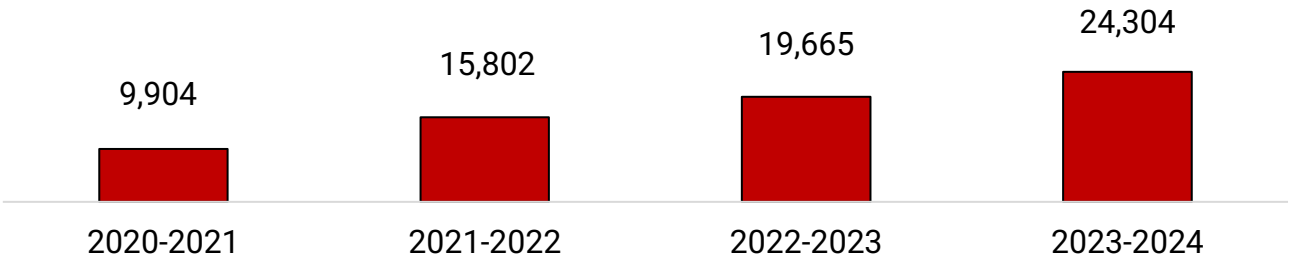


In 2024, we experienced continued growth in students served, as we have consistently done since our inception, increasing our impact on the Harlem Community

## Student Count Over Time

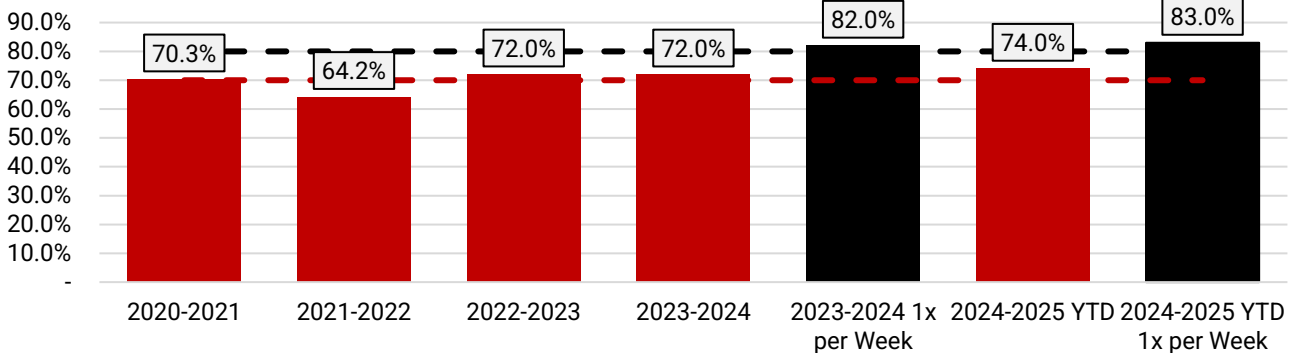


## Hours of Programming Over Time



Attendance has remained consistently above 70%, our target for students across our cohorts. When using 1 day per week as our attendance standard we have over 80% attendance. Both of these metrics improved in 2023-2024 and have continued to grow YTD in 2024-2025

## Attendance Rates vs. Attendance Goals<sup>(1)</sup>



Go to our [Website](#) to see our program in action!



Students hard at work in the learning center!



Students getting ready to begin MMA training, with a lesson on intention and attitude



Students in action at the MMA training center!

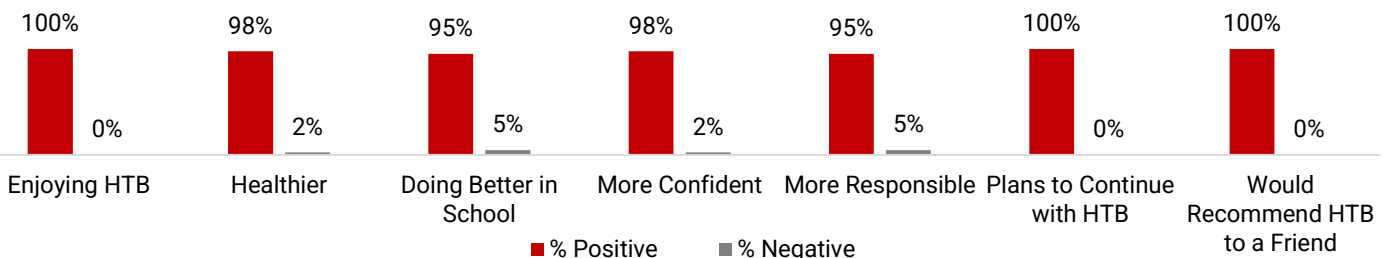


Students on one of the weekly field trips during summer programming

## Parent Satisfaction Survey

- The results of our parent satisfaction survey were overwhelmingly positive, and 100% of parents indicated that they plan to continue with HTB and would recommend HTB to a friend!

### 2023-2024 Parent Survey Results



# Inaugural Benefit Dinner

- On October 8<sup>th</sup>, Hit the Books hosted its **First Annual Benefit Dinner**. This was an opportunity for Hit the Books to engage with our supporters on our progress, celebrate our impact, and recognize our inaugural honorees: **Jordan Barrow (Champion Award) and Tony Hillery (Leadership Award)**
- The HTB Benefit Dinner took place at BLT Prime in NYC and was an evening filled with food and drink, mingling, performances by Harpist Erin Hill and Singer Greginald Spencer, impactful presentations, and lots of giving to support the work of HTB!
- We are humbled to have **welcomed 140+ guests who raised a total of \$124,878** to invest in Hit the Books' continued growth
- Lastly, we would like to extend a special thank you to the Inaugural HTB Benefit Dinners **Corporate Sponsors: The National Football League, Shenkman Capital, BLT Prime, and Bayview Asset Management**



**Tony Hillery**  
Leadership Award Recipient



**Jordan Barrow**  
Champion Award Recipient

Our most important stakeholders have been and continue to be our students and their parents. Below we highlighted feedback from our HTB families!

## Student Anecdotes



Alana R.  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade

“ [What I like most about Hit the Books is] the way the coaches and teachers teach. I won’t feel like I’d have to be embarrassed if I go to them with a problem - I know they’ll try to help me through it.”

“ I like that we have our own community and that we get to have fun while getting better at different things. ”



Aisha D.  
6<sup>th</sup> Grade

“ Every time I walk past here I saw everyone having fun and doing martial arts and I wanted to be included in that. It’s way more fun here than watching from outside.”



Mason O.  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade

## Parent Feedback

### Why Did you Choose Hit the Books For Your Child?

“I heard from other parents about the amazing progress their children made since joining.”

“I love that my child is at a place where they are cared for and challenged to grow.”

“My child needed extra help catching up on their work, and HTB had the resources to support them.”

### What Does Your Child Enjoy About Hit the Books?

“They’ve made so many new friends and love the relationships they’ve built with the staff and other students.”

“He enjoys the sense of community and how they feel like they belong.”

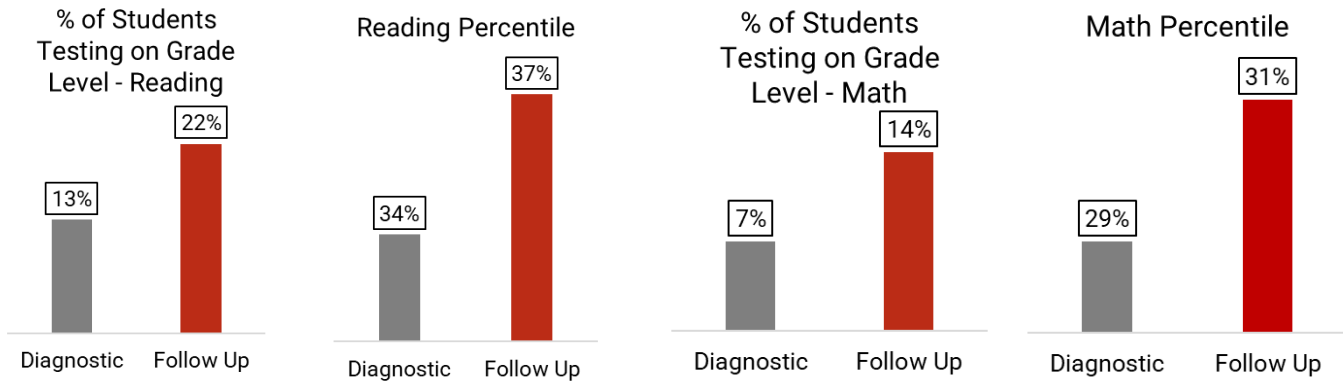
“The MMA classes are their favorite! They love learning new techniques and combos.”

“She loves that Hit the Books is a place where students can be themselves.”

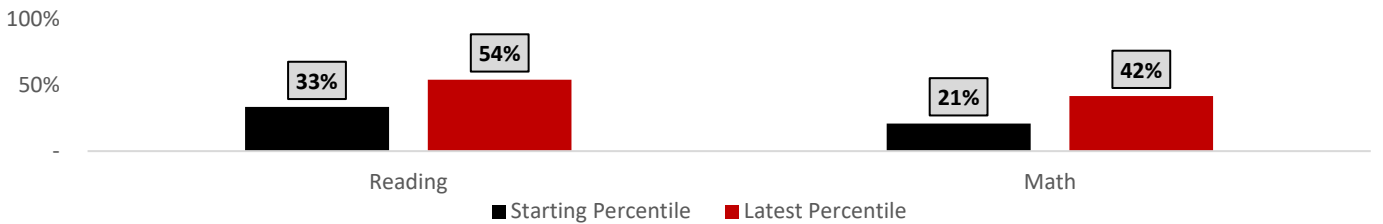
# Our Impact



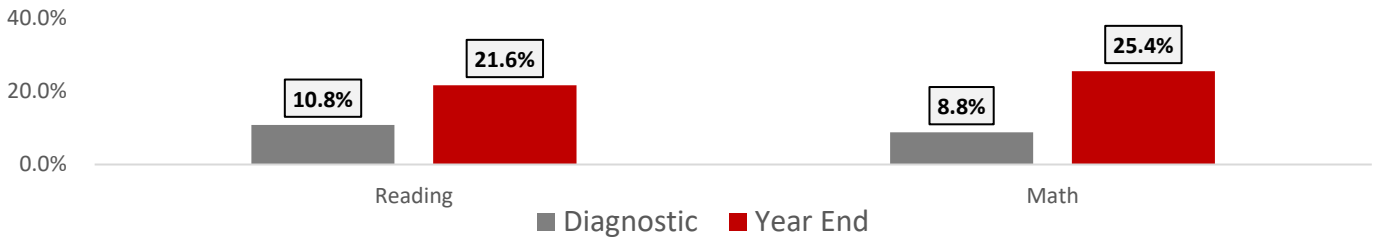
At Hit the Books our focus remains the impact we have on our students. Our students' growth in academics and fitness reached new highs in 2024.



## Multi Year Academic Percentile Improvement



## Hit the Books Lifetime Test Results: % of Students on Grade Level



## Student Fitness Growth From Day 1

**Squats**  
3,476%

**Push Ups**  
505%

**Sit Ups**  
2,695%

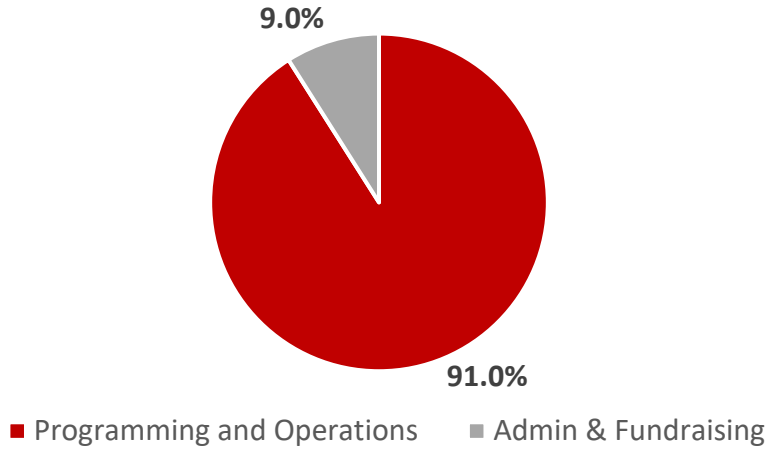
**Laps**  
1,638%

**Improved Students**  
100%

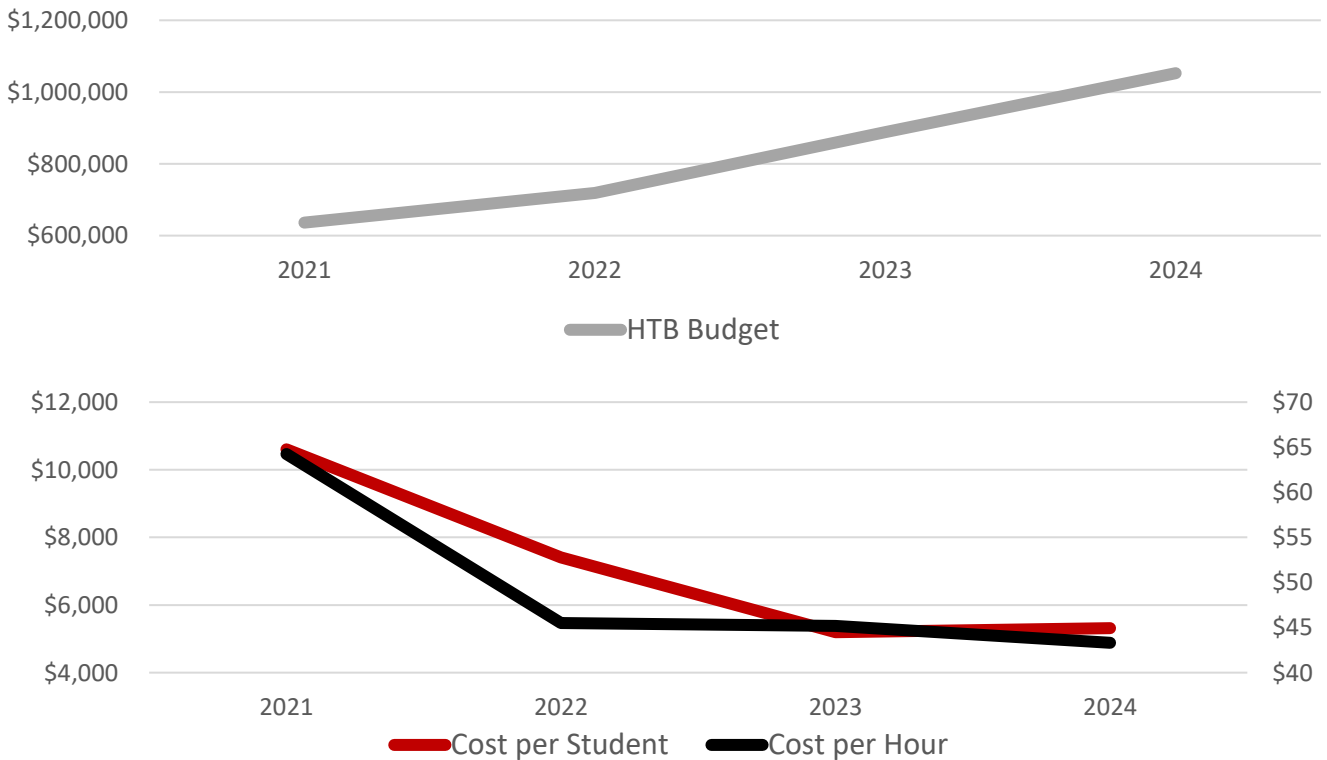
# Financial Summary



Hit the Books has spent over 90% of its funds on programming and operations in order to maximize impact. We expect this ratio to dip slightly in 2025 due to plans to expand our infrastructure. However, we anticipate it to normalize in the future following program growth.



Our budget has grown every year since we opened. However, our cost per student is down 49% since 2021 and cost per hour of programming is down 32%, falling 4% this year despite our budget growing 18%<sup>(1)</sup>

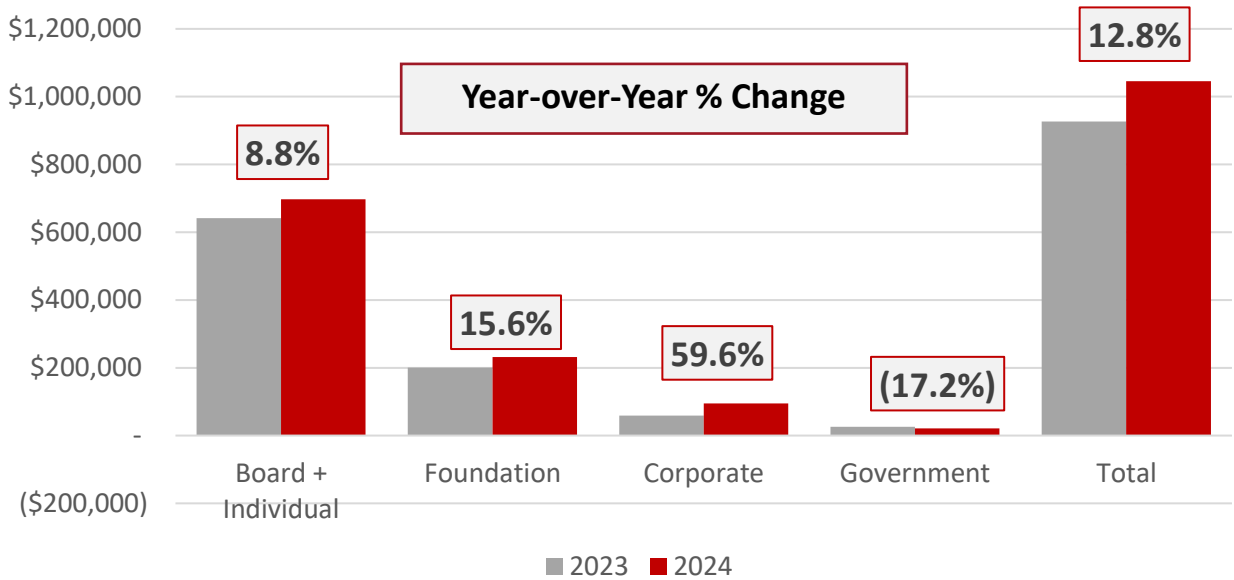


\*Numbers are approximate due to fiscal year (calendar) and operating year (August end) mismatch. Students + tutors calculated on operating year basis vs. budget calculated on fiscal year basis  
 (1) Student count includes all children enrolled in the program

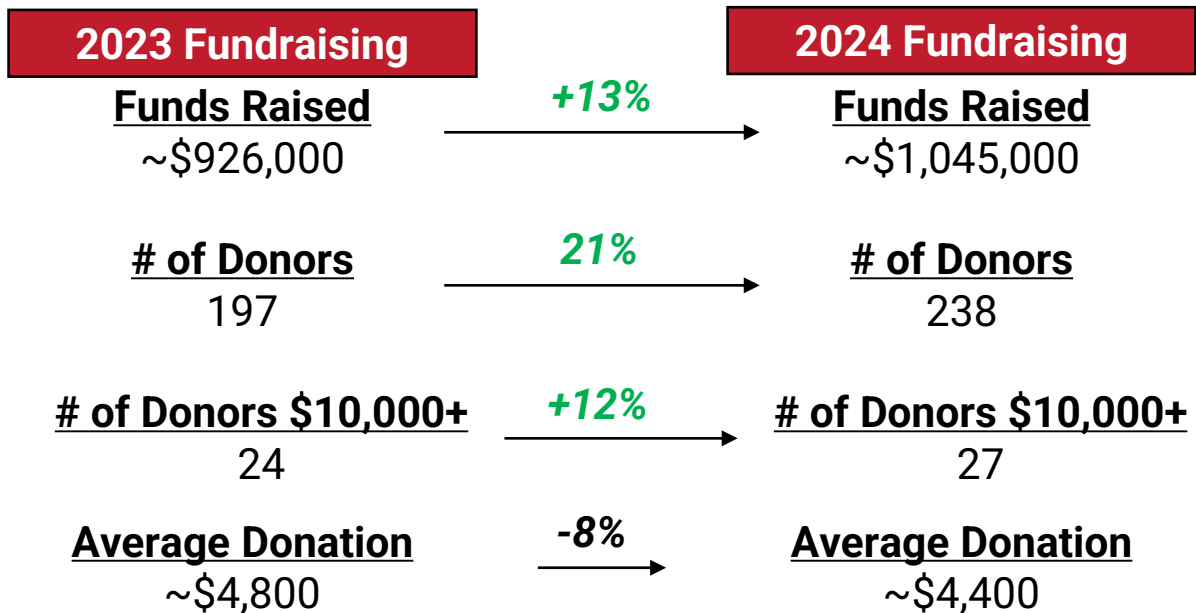
# Donor Summary



We were able to meaningfully grow fundraising in 2024, driven largely by growth in Foundation and Corporate donors. We also have nearly \$200,000 of committed funding entering 2025, putting us in a strong financial position to support our programming.



In 2025 we were able to grow the sources of our largest donations (>\$10,000) as we have focused on larger dollar institutional funding. At the same time, we were successful in growing our individual donor base through grass roots fundraising efforts.



# Thank You!



- We continue to be ***incredibly grateful for all of the support*** our donors provided. We mean it when we say, ***the organization would not function without you!***
- **THANK YOU** to everyone who has contributed, and we hope we will continue to have your support for years to come!

## Corporate Donors



AMERICAN SECURITIES



**BAYVIEW**  
ASSET MANAGEMENT

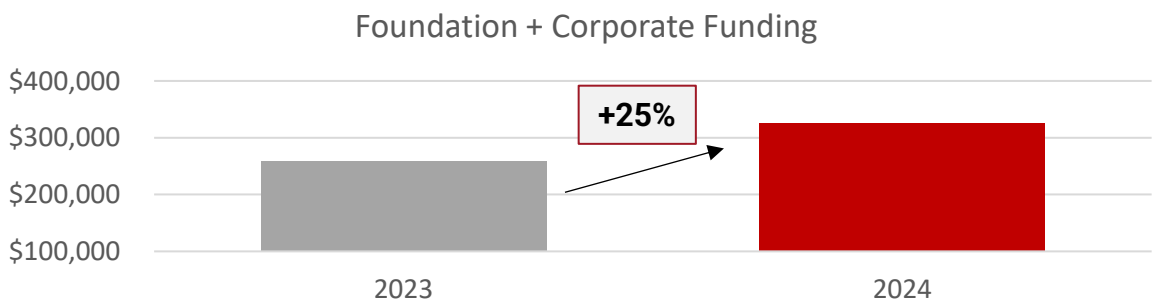
**SHENKMAN**

## Foundation and Government Donors



## Repeat Donors

Foundation and Corporate Funding Continues to Grow, with Renewed Support from past Donors!



While we had a minor deficit in 2024, it was largely driven by donation timing with substantial funding expected in January 2025.

## Statements of Financial Activity - Unaudited Cash Basis

	<u>FY24</u>
Board + Individual	\$697,514
Foundation	\$231,684
Corporate	\$94,674
Government	\$21,285
<b>Total Funds Raised</b>	<b>\$1,045,157</b>
Staffing	\$631,785
Program Resources	\$64,850
Facility	\$261,332
Administrative	\$38,538
Fundraising	\$56,096
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,052,601</b>
Starting Balance	\$198,541
<b>Surplus / (Deficit)</b>	<b>(\$7,444)</b>
<b>Ending Cash</b>	<b>\$191,097</b>

# Board Members

HTB's Board has grown significantly, bringing together a group of dedicated leaders with diverse backgrounds and experiences to help optimize the organization and our impact on the community



**Justin Haber**

Justin co-founded Hit the Books in 2019. Justin serves as Chair of the Board of Hit the Books and currently works at Point72



**Zach Levy**

Zach co-founded Hit the Books in 2019. Zach currently serves as Vice-Chair of the Board and currently works at New Mountain Capital



**Jhae Thompson**

Jhae joined the HTB Board in 2023. Jhae currently serves as Executive Director of HTB, and has 15 years of nonprofit leadership experience



**Kazz Alexander Pinkard**

Kazz Alexander served as Executive Director of HTB from 2020 – 2022. Before joining HTB, he served as the Chief Program Officer at The Boys' Club of New York and as Deputy Director at Ramapo For Children



**Victor Lawrence-Boadum**

Victor joined the HTB Board in 2022. Victor currently serves as an ESG Manager at Coupa Software. He was previously involved with several charitable organizations in NYC



**Caeli Harr**

Caeli joined the HTB Board in 2023. Caeli currently works as an Account Executive for Salesforce, and was previously a volunteer for the Boys & Girls Organization



**Sushma Chennubhotla**

Sushma joined the HTB Board in 2024. Sushma is a neurologist with a specialty in headache medicine. She is a proud mom to two young children, and is passionate about youth causes.



**Tushar Khadloya**

Tushar joined the HTB Board in 2024. Tushar is a Managing Partner of Rock Capital Investments. He has supported a variety of nonprofit causes over the years, particularly those involving education and youth, in the U.S. and abroad.



**Jordan Gruber**

Jordan joined the HTB Board in 2024. Jordan currently leads Partnerships & Licensing at Fanatics and prior to this, she led Athlete Partnerships at META. Jordan has spent her career working across the sports industry.



**Mark Bai**

Mark joined the HTB Board in 2023. Mark is currently a Partner with True Search, where he focuses on placing senior executives for the world's most innovative technology companies



**Philip Isom**

Phillip joined the HTB Board in 2022. Phillip currently works as a senior associate at JP Morgan, in the office of the Global Private Bank Chief Product Officer

Please meet our incredible staff, led by Jhae, Kalima, and Stan, and supported by our talented operations, MMA, and education team members



**Jhae Thompson**  
Executive Director



**Kalima Gilkes**  
Director of Education



**Stan Dryev**  
Director of Mixed Martial Arts

**Kenny Stukes**  
Director of Site  
Operations

**Joseph Weisman**  
MMA Coach

**Jesus Bautista**  
MMA Coach

**Jean Kim**  
MMA Coach

**Ana Garcia**  
MMA Coach

**Mimz Turnier**  
Program  
Coordinator

**Elizabeth  
Concepcion**  
Achievement  
Coach

**Alex Morgan**  
Achievement  
Coach

**Glory De La Cruz**  
Site Operations  
Coordinator

**Columbia  
University Interns**  
Peihua Wang  
Joel Anglade



Thank You