



## **SEO (Sponsors for Educational Opportunity) Expands its Free, Eight-Year College Success Program Aimed at Increasing College Graduation Rates to High School Students Across Miami-Dade County**

*Local Ninth Grade Students Can Now Apply to Participate in the Program's Inaugural Class, With the First Cohort Starting in February 2025*

**MIAMI, September 20, 2024** – [SEO \(Sponsors for Educational Opportunity\)](#), a nonprofit organization that aims to create a more equitable society for motivated young people, has officially expanded its SEO Scholars program to Miami-Dade County. Local ninth grade students can now apply to participate in the free, eight-year academic program that takes high school students to and through college with an 85 percent graduation rate, in comparison to only 60 percent of all students who enter college nationally and 20 percent of students who come from similar backgrounds. Miami is the fourth U.S. city where SEO will bring educational learning, development, and mentorship opportunities to students, having already established successful educational programs in New York City, San Francisco, and North Carolina.

“According to recent data from [U.S. News & World Report](#), nearly 55 percent of the Miami-Dade County Public School student population is economically disadvantaged,” said William Goodloe, President & CEO of SEO. “Through SEO Scholars Miami, we will close the opportunity gap for students to get them to and through college. Based on our experience in New York City, San Francisco, and North Carolina, we know that this is achievable and that the program will have an immense impact on the futures of Miami’s young people.”

Founded more than 60 years ago, SEO serves about 2,500 students from low-income backgrounds on an annual basis through its Scholars program. Each year, 100 percent of SEO Scholars are accepted to four-year colleges and universities across the U.S. Of those students, 85 percent of them graduate having earned a bachelor’s degree, and 80 percent are first-generation college graduates.

“Having served academic programs in Miami for close to 20 years, I acutely understand the need for SEO Scholars here, and I appreciate SEO’s vision and dedication to bringing the program to the Magic City to close the opportunity gap once and for all,” said Margarita Mesa, Executive Director of SEO Scholars Miami. “Through SEO Scholars Miami, we’ll have the incredible opportunity to help make college a reality for well-deserving, hard-working students across Miami-Dade County, starting with those who began high school during the 2024-2025 academic school year.”

Through SEO Scholars Miami, ninth grade students will participate in a supplemental academic program, conducted online and in person. In total, students will complete more than 600 additional hours of academic instruction which is the equivalent of 1.5 years of math and 2.5 years of English language arts. Additionally, as part of a summer enrichment program, students will complete internships, travel abroad, and participate in college prep courses. As they progress up and through the 11th grade, SEO Miami Scholars participants will work one-on-one with mentors as well as college advisors who will coach them on creating college lists, drafting personal statements for college admissions, and applying for scholarships and financial aid.

It's free for ninth grade students, who reside in Miami-Dade County and attend a Miami-Dade County public high school, to apply and enroll in SEO Scholars Miami via its [website](#). Students will be considered and selected for the program based on numerous criteria, including their current academic standing, whether they'd be a first-generation college student, their family's income level, and their ability to participate and thrive in an academically rigorous program, among other factors. The application period is open now and will close on December 6, 2024. The inaugural SEO Scholars Miami class will begin in February 2025, and it is anticipated to include 60 students.

Over the next eight years, SEO Scholars Miami expects to serve hundreds of students, starting as ninth graders and taking them through college. The cumulative expenses for the program will be more than \$30 million. To date, SEO has received monetary donations from local and national leaders and institutions, including a \$1 million grant from The Knight Foundation.

Orlando Bravo, SEO Board Member and Founder and Managing Partner of Thoma Bravo, is spearheading the SEO Scholars Miami expansion and will serve as the Chair of the SEO Scholars Miami Board. Together, Bravo and other business and community leaders, including Henry Kravis, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Chairman, KKR; Ken Griffin, Founder and CEO, Citadel; Jon Paul "JP" Perez, President, Related Group; Bill Ford, Chairman and CEO, General Atlantic; and Scott Collins, Managing Director & COO, Summit Partners, L.P., have provided leadership gifts to support the launch of SEO Scholars Miami.

"Over the last few years, Miami has expanded exponentially as an innovation hub, a diverse community, and a thriving business market. This is exactly why I chose to open a Thoma Bravo office here, and to make the city my home, too," said Orlando Bravo. "Now more than ever, we need to ensure that the next generation in this great city is given every opportunity to thrive as active citizens, young scholars, and future leaders. I've seen the remarkable impact SEO Scholars has had on underserved students in other markets, and I profoundly understand the potential for the program to help further propel Miami-Dade County students forward as they seek to establish their own paths toward academic and professional success."

#### **About SEO Scholars:**

SEO Scholars is a free, eight-year, academic program that transforms public high school students into college graduates. It successfully educates and mentors underserved, low-income public high school students to and through college with an 85 percent graduation rate, setting the standard for academics, mentorship, community, peer-to-peer support, and a powerful, lifelong network. SEO Scholars currently operates academic programs in New York City, San Francisco, and North Carolina, with its newest program launching in Miami in February 2025. More information on SEO Scholars is available at [www.seo-usa.org/scholars](http://www.seo-usa.org/scholars).

#### **About SEO (Sponsors for Educational Opportunity):**

SEO (Sponsors for Educational Opportunity) was founded in 1963 with a mission to create a more equitable society by providing exceptional educational and career opportunities annually to more than 7,000 talented and motivated young people. For more than 60 years, SEO has been an innovator in education, mentorship and peer-to-peer support, championing untapped talent with the drive to succeed to realize their potential, achieve excellence and leverage diverse networks. Learn more at [www.seo-usa.org](http://www.seo-usa.org).