

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Los Angeles-area Families and Organizations Receive \$142,500 for Rethinking Educational Options to Meet Students' and Families' Needs

Students, parents, community organizations developing innovative models as pandemic subsides

JULY 7, 2021 — National nonprofit [VELA Education Fund](#) announced today that Los Angeles-area families and organizations will receive \$142,500 through Meet the Moment 2.0, a grant program that supports innovative, nontraditional education programs. The funding is spread across 15 grantees, a collection of students, parents, educators, and community leaders from Los Angeles and Orange counties who are designing custom education solutions for their communities.

Grantees include Genevieve Chin, an 18-year-old who founded the Los Angeles Youth Changemakers Initiative to encourage other teenagers to pursue interdisciplinary exploration and social entrepreneurship. Chin, who will enroll in UCLA this fall, and her sister, Roselyn, who's a high school student, are working with the public library system to engage students across the city in hackathons and workshops to expose young people to the myriad of careers they could explore.

"This inspiring group of grantees are everyday entrepreneurs who are taking action to ensure children in and around LA have educational opportunities that meet their needs," said Meredith Olson, VELA's president. "The pandemic underscored the importance of adaptation, and VELA's grantees are developing nimble, creative approaches to education that put families in the driver's seat."

The \$142,500 in funding to Los Angeles-area residents is part of more than \$2.1 million being awarded to 233 recipients across the country. These grantees are developing a range of nontraditional approaches, including microschoools, homeschool co-ops, and after-school programs, that reflect how families are rethinking their children's educational experience.

Los Angeles-area grantees include:

Yolande Beckles, activist and founder of [The Knowledge Shop](#)

When Beckles moved to California from her native England, her son asked her a question. "My 8-year-old little Black boy asked me if I loved him, because if I loved him, why would I put him in those schools?" Beckles became an education advocate, and today she is the co-founder of The Knowledge Shop, a nonprofit in south Los Angeles. The grant from VELA will support a new initiative from The Knowledge Shop focused on providing early childhood education training and programs for parents, grandparents, community members and childcare providers.

Iris Chen, author of [Untigering](#)

Iris Chen is an author and [unschooling](#) mother of two children. Unschooling is a consent-based lifestyle and educational approach that values children's self-direction and autonomy. Chen received a grant from VELA to support writing a new book about her experience with unschooling, especially as an Asian American who grew up in a highly structured, traditional school environment where academic achievement was emphasized. The book is expected in fall 2022.

Sam Starnes, founder of [Learning Individual Studies Academy](#)

As student engagement ebbed during the pandemic, Sam Starnes had one goal: to do “anything that would make a child not hate learning.” At her learning center, which hosts pods and tutoring sessions, Starnes started offering mixed martial arts, fine arts, piano, and basketball classes. It became a “homeschool school,” with many programs and opportunities all happening in one location. As the pandemic subsides, Starnes received a grant to transition her program to an accessible after-school program.

These Los Angeles grant recipients were chosen from more than 500 applications that VELA received. Applicants came from 47 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“We are impressed by the ideas that caught fire during the pandemic and by the humanity that everyday entrepreneurs are bringing back to education,” said Olson, VELA Education Fund President. “VELA’s Meet the Moment 2.0 investment will help to sustain and expand this innovative education movement going forward.”

Please contact [Lisa Cohen](#) if you are interested in a story on these education innovations in the Los Angeles area.

About VELA Education Fund

VELA Education Fund is an independent national nonprofit that invests in nontraditional education innovations that meet the needs of learners and families. VELA partners with organizations and communities to administer grants to eligible individuals and organizations that are innovating outside of the traditional education system. VELA connects its grantees to a national network and provides them with a platform to elevate their work and learning. Through Meet the Moment 1.0, VELA worked with five partners to distribute more than \$2.7 million to 450 grantees, who were located in 43 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Together, the Meet the Moment 1.0 grantees impacted more than 225,000 children and families.

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