


# ANNUAL REPORT 2025



# OPENING LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY FROM TINA

*New Roots Charter School will empower young people as citizens and entrepreneurs that create just, democratic communities, and thriving green economies that restore the natural world that sustains us.*

This powerful vision has been a guiding light since our very beginnings. 2025 was a watershed year in bringing it to life! Our dedicated faculty and staff earned SUNY's highest award for excellence, a five-year charter renewal, with permission to expand to offer the middle school program long awaited by our community. 100% of our graduates left high school with college credits, college acceptance, and a resume reflecting sustainability credentials that employers value.

The impacts of this are far-reaching, for both our young people and our community.

When we first opened our doors in 2009, the importance of "sustainability" seemed theoretical to many. Now in our seventeenth year, the impacts of global climate change, changing resources, and shifting geopolitics are increasingly apparent. The urgent need for more sustainable practices in all facets of life is clear, as is the need to prepare our youth with solutionary thinking and skill sets – not to mention the "informed optimism" referenced in our vision statement.

The heart of education for sustainability at New Roots is for each young person to understand their own strengths, passions, and interests, and develop the skills, understanding, and personal capacity that they will need to envision and create the life they want for themselves now and in the future.

For 17 years, New Roots has created a learning experience that plants the seeds of this understanding and growth. It is inspiring to see how this has taken root in the lives of our New Roots alumni. They are botanists, city planners, artists, entrepreneurs, and farmers. They study engineering, computer science, law, and psychology. In their life choices, they demonstrate an understanding of themselves as essential members of their community and their ecosystems.

I am grateful to be part of a community that brings the core values of the New Roots vision and mission to life at this pivotal moment in Earth's history. Thank you for your contributions to "growing New Roots" into a thriving community resource for now, and our collective future.

With gratitude,
Tina




# 2025 IN REVIEW

Established in 2009, New Roots Charter School is a small, tuition-free public school with a big mission, located in the heart of downtown Ithaca. Open to any student eligible for grades 6-12 in our wider region, our college and life preparatory program engages students in learning actively, thinking critically, and solving problems creatively and collaboratively, developing the knowledge and skills to be 21st century solutionaries working towards a sustainable future. Small school, bright future!

## CHARTER RENEWAL AND NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL

At the recommendation of the SUNY Charter Schools Institute, in March 2025 SUNY's Committee on Charter Schools unanimously approved a five-year charter renewal and authorized New Roots to operate a middle school program for grades 6-8 beginning in the 2025-26 school year.

Our middle school program launched in September 2025, enrolling about 50 students across grades 6-8 in its first year, surpassing our original enrollment goal of 30-35 students and maintaining a waitlist. We hosted an ice cream social and several Discover Cayuga Lake cruises over the summer to welcome our new middle school students and families to the New Roots community. The middle school program is off to a great start, with a fabulous group of teachers and a lively, curious, and talented inaugural group of young learners!

The New Roots middle school program is a Montessori-inspired learning environment, integrating research-based best practices that have been proven effective in Montessori schools internationally. These include student-centered classrooms, a strong sense of community; a variety of lesson modes and ways of expressing learning; block scheduling; hands-on work; multilayered, engaging projects; and a focus on service, among others.

The New Roots middle school program is co-located in the Clinton House with the high school program, which continues to offer a four-year sequence of rigorous academic courses connected by interdisciplinary themes, including concurrent enrollment classes for college credit through TC3's CollegeNow program; personalized learning; and real-world educational experiences and fieldwork in the wider community and natural world. Our career exploration pathways allow high school students to explore different career fields, build a strong college application, and gain skills that prepare them for either college acceptance or a living wage entry-level career.

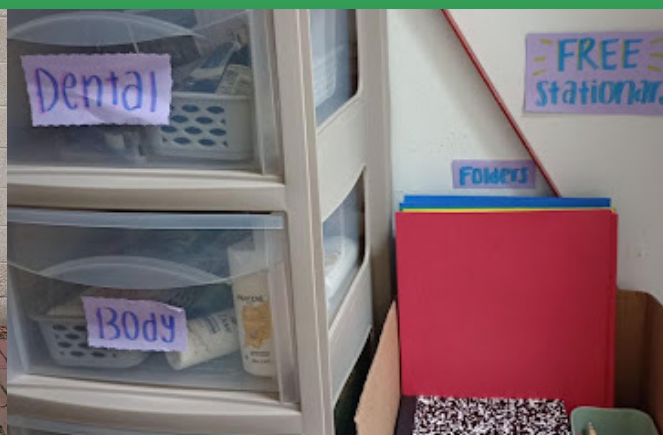
## EXPANSION GRANT

In late 2025, New Roots received exciting news from the New York State Education Department's Charter Schools Office that our school received preliminary approval for a Charter Schools Program expansion grant of $2 million dollars. This three-year grant will provide funding for us to fully articulate our middle school curriculum and create a plan to meet our facilities needs as we grow, as well as to expand our outreach to the rural communities surrounding Ithaca. We look forward to sharing further updates with the community as we launch this exciting expansion project!

# 2025 GRANTS








## ITHACA ROTARY CLUB GRANT

In September 2025, New Roots was awarded a $1000 Community Grant from the Ithaca Rotary Club to scale up the school's free personal care product pantry for students.

The personal care product pantry program was first launched in the 2024-25 school year by students in New Roots' Rotary Interact Club, also known as the Newts for Needs Service Crew, which meets weekly during the school year to plan service projects under the leadership of New Roots science teacher Nicole Sly. The goal of the initiative was to provide free resources for the school's low-income student population, reducing barriers to school attendance and academic success. The pantry was first launched with personal care items donated by members of our school community, as well as some items purchased using a Wegmans donation and a small grant from the Human Services Coalition. The pantry is stocked with items such as shampoo, conditioner, soap, sunscreen, band-aids, toothpaste, toothbrushes, floss, combs, and menstrual products.

The Ithaca Rotary Club grant allowed New Roots to purchase additional stock for the pantry to serve more students, including the new middle school students, as well as add an array of basic school supplies to the pantry for students in need, at no cost.

**All New Roots students are Rotary Interact club members!**




# ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY GRANT

In 2025, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notified New Roots that our Environmental Education grant application was selected for funding. We were awarded a two-year grant of $100,000 to fund an environmental education project that will engage all students in our school in a multi-year sequence of learning activities integrated throughout our curriculum that engage them in moving along the environmental education continuum from awareness and knowledge to informed action and stewardship. Guided by partners from the Gayogohono Nation, our students will integrate traditional ecological knowledge with scientific knowledge to understand the issues impacting water quality in Cayuga Lake, the primary source of water for our city and a major recreation area, and how these issues impact our health and quality of life, particularly for marginalized communities.

This grant will feature further development of the Cayuga Wetlands Restoration, a project initiated in 2016 as a Senior Capstone Project by students inspired by a unit in David Streib's Environmental Science course. Since the project's inception, support from the Park Foundation and the Department of Environmental Conservation led to the development of the Youth Ecological Conservation Corps, creating paid summer employment to support ecological restoration work in the south end of Cayuga Lake.

**The Cayuga Wetlands Restoration project was born in 2016 based on the initiative of students in a senior science class and wisdom shared by Sachem (Chief) Samuel George of Cayuga Nation.**





# COMMUNITY CLASSROOM





## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

New Roots recently embarked on several exciting partnerships in collaboration with local organizations and institutions in the community. Notable partnerships in 2025 have included Cornell Cooperative Extension's Energy Warriors Program, the Learning Web, Ithaca Rotary Club, Historic Ithaca, Ithaca ReUse Center, Ithaca Murals, Cornell University's Einhorn Center for Community Engagement, and Cornell University's Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research.

During the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years, New Roots has partnered with Cornell University's Einhorn Center for Community Engagement to host interns through the Empire State Service Corps. Our Empire State Service Corps interns have assisted with special projects, school events, small group tutoring, and more, enriching our school community with their unique passions, skills, and interests. Our intern Taylor was recognized with an "Excellence in Service Above and Beyond" award at the 2025 Empire State Service Corps summit event. Congratulations, Taylor, and thank you to our interns Issy and Lili for their contributions and service!

New Roots also partnered with the GripTape Learning Challenge, a program of Cornell's Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research. A group of six New Roots students participated in the GripTape Learning Challenge, a highly competitive program in which selected students ("GripTape Challengers") received a $250 grant to pursue a project of their choosing and were paired with a mentor to guide them through the project. New Roots students' projects ranged from designing a prosthetic hand, to launching a small upcycled sustainable fashion business, to learning welding, metalworking, and video animation.

**"Learning sustainability and community awareness is so vital in this life, but being able to put it to practice on a daily basis is amazing." - *Parent, 8th grade and 12th grade, 2025***





# COMMUNITY CLASSROOM





## COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING & INTERNSHIPS

Our school places high value on hands-on, experiential and place-based learning - and we wouldn't be able to offer the breadth of experiences without community members being willing to engage with young people. In 2025, students were engaged throughout the community through site visits and regular weekly internships, both unpaid and paid. Some of the businesses and organizations that we worked with include: Greenstar Cooperative Market, the Cornell Sheep Barns, the Durland Alternatives Library's Prisoner Express project, Gimme! Coffee, Assemblywoman Kelles' Office, and many more.

In the Fall Semester 25% of our high school students were actively interning in our community, following their interests and learning hands-on practical life skills as well as the soft skills that will serve them well in everything they do in the future!

**"High quality instruction is evident throughout New Roots . . . Teachers consistently present learning objectives aligned to the curricular framework. Teachers focus on planning differentiated activities to address the array of learning needs within their classes and effectively implement them during lessons."** ***- From our 2025 Charter Renewal Report***





# EarthForce





## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The mission of EarthForce is to prepare Tompkins County youth for success by developing career-ready leadership skills for climate justice and a growing green economy. The EarthForce program focuses on the knowledge and skills needed to help build new systems for energy, water, food, transportation, waste and business—systems that respond to the realities of climate change and shifting energy needs. The program is designed to prepare students across all career interests to think environmentally and act entrepreneurially. EarthForce is supported by Cornell Cooperative Extension's Energy Warriors Program, the Park Foundation, and a grant from the Tompkins County Community Recovery Fund.

2025 was an action-packed year for the EarthForce program at New Roots! EarthForce programming highlights include:

Katie Church, our first EarthForce Program Manager, was hired with funding provided by the Tompkins County Community Recovery Fund in late 2024. In 2025, she expanded community partnerships to develop opportunities for work-based learning experiences aligned with EarthForce program goals.

Twenty-one New Roots students completed the Roots of Success environmental literacy course in 2025, offered in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension's Energy Warriors Program. Students who complete the course earn six college credits through Tompkins Cortland Community College and receive Environmental Literacy Certification from the U.S. Department of Labor. Roots of Success is a required course that students take in grades 10 or 11.
New Roots hosted its first-ever Climate Fair in downtown Ithaca in April 2025. Seventeen community partners participated in the fair by tabling, hosting demonstrations and activities, sharing resources, and educating community members about their organizations' missions.

A group of about 50 New Roots students went on a field trip to SUNY Morrisville's Renewable Energy Programs and Agricultural and Clean Energy Technology Center in May 2025. Students attended a tour and demo of residential and commercial heat pump systems, a walk-through of the on-site solar farm, a demonstration of pressing sunflower seeds into biodiesel, and wind turbine lab activities.





# EarthForce





## MURAL PROJECT

New Roots partnered with Ithaca Murals in 2025 to produce an EarthForce-inspired, student-designed mural on the downtown Ithaca Commons through the Public Art and Community Connections elective held in the Spring 2025 semester. Funded by generous grants from the Park Foundation and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, the vibrant mural, which represented students' vision of sustainability, community, and imagination, garnered significant community interest and received coverage in several local and regional news outlets. You can view the colorful mural at 102 The Commons, across the street from New Roots.







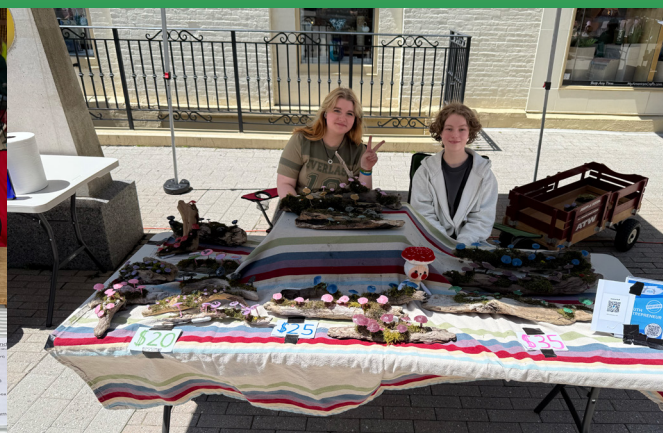





# ENTREPRENEURSHIP








## HIGHLIGHTS AND TRANSITION

The mission of the Youth Entrepreneurship Market (YEM), a program launched at New Roots in 2017, is to inspire entrepreneurial thinking in students grades 4-12 through hands-on learning and community connections. Participants engage in a workshop series to learn about startups from local entrepreneurs and coaches, and launch their ideas into the community through markets and festivals.

From 2017 to 2025, YEM expanded from a single market in Press Bay Alley to being a presence at Ithaca's many festivals, including Rootstock, the youth music festival held on the Ithaca Commons in May, a collaboration between New Roots and Grassroots Festival of Music and Dance. You can also find YEM vendors at the Ithaca Farmer's Market.

2025 was a major year for YEM as it began the transition to becoming its own nonprofit organization under the direction of former New Roots Director of Community Engagement Michael Mazza and Ethan Ash. New Roots is continuing to serve as the location for YEM weekly workshops during the 2025-26 school year and looks forward to continued collaboration with YEM.

Several current New Roots students have launched their own small business ventures through YEM, including Liv Brando, who sells prints, buttons, and stickers featuring her original artwork through her business called The Laughing Cat; and Ayden Githinji, who launched Solar Smithed, a small jewelry business featuring items that have been sold in 15 Steps, a gift shop on the Ithaca Commons.

Big thanks to the Park Foundation for providing grant funding to help establish and sustain the program since 2021!

**"Parents also highlight the school's community-based learning model, field trips, extracurricular offerings, and hands-on experiences that are integrated into the curriculum." - *From our 2025 Charter Renewal Report***




**Co-presenters Left to right:**

Carissa Tirado-Marks, Mundo Verde Charter School
Brendan Haggerty, Green Schools National Network
Jeremy Stone, Common Ground High School
David Streib, New Roots Charter School
Joel Tolman, Common Ground High School
Tina Nilsen-Hodges, New Roots Charter School

# GREEN SCHOOL NATIONAL NETWORK

In March 2025, Founder and Principal Tina Nilsen-Hodges and Academic Dean David Streib traveled to Orlando, Florida to be part of a team leading a conference session titled "Growing Environmental Justice Problem-Solvers through 4PBL" at the annual Green Schools National Network conference. Partners included the Green Schools National Network and two other leading green schools, Common Ground High School and Mundo Verde Public Charter School.

"4PBL" is an educational approach that aims to improve student achievement and problem-solving skills by incorporating phenomena, place, project, and problem-based learning within the context of sustainability to inspire students to build their solutionary skill sets, including critical systems and strategic thinking. New Roots Charter School is recognized as a national leader in utilizing this approach to learning.

In this workshop, participants learned about the framework's structure, where students explore engaging phenomena, deepen connections to their environment, undertake meaningful projects, and tackle real-world problems in their community. Our Cayuga Wetlands Restoration Project was presented as an exemplar for this approach to learning.

**"Teachers at New Roots consistently challenge students with activities that deepen understanding and higher order thinking skills. Teachers present high level questions with an interdisciplinary focus that allows students to make deep connections between concepts and content areas." - *From our 2025 Charter Renewal Report***



# CLASS OF 2025
# COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES & SCHOLARSHIPS

In June of 2025, New Roots gave a fond farewell to the Class of 2025 and sent them off into the world to embark on the next chapter of their lives! Class of 2025 graduates went on to attend colleges including Champlain College, University of Rochester, Ithaca College, Thomas Jefferson University, SUNY Brockport, Virginia Commonwealth University, Mount Holyoke, SUNY Buffalo, Georgia State University, Eckerd College, Alfred State University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Appalachian State University, and TC3. Our graduates' intended majors of study represented a wide array of career pathways, including biomedical engineering, mechanical engineering, computer science, nutritional sciences, marine biology, psychology, writing, art, business, and library science.

Class of 2025 graduates received a combined total of $2,776,000.00 in financial awards and scholarships, a notable amount for a group of 39 graduates!

Our top-earning Class of 2025 student graduated high school with 38 college credits through TC3's CollegeNow dual enrollment program, at no cost. The average number of college credits earned per student in the Class of 2025 was 18.4.

**Congratulations to our Class of 2025!**

**"Parents of students now in college feel New Roots prepared them for success in college and in making a positive impact on the world." -** ***From our 2025 Charter Renewal Report***




## ALUMNI REUNION

New Roots hosted its first-ever alumni reunion in June 2025! We had a fabulous turnout for the event, with over 20 alumni attending, along with their partners and family members. A number of current staff and staff "alumni" attended as well, including Fran and Paul Speight and Maria Gimma. We had so much fun catching up with alumni and can't wait for the next reunion.



**"I am attending Ithaca College where I intend to major in Business Marketing. My first semester in college has been great! One thing that surprised me about life after high school is how prepared I was for college. New Roots helped with that by giving me the opportunity to earn so many college credits that I came into Ithaca College as a Sophomore." - *2025 Graduate***

**Are you a New Roots alum who would be interested in helping to plan the next alumni event?**
**Reach out to us at alumni@newrootsschool.org!**






# KESTREL PERCH FARM






## FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAM

In the summer of 2025, New Roots wrapped up a two-year, $100,000.00 Farm to School grant awarded by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service in 2023 to expand the size and capacity of the school farm, a three-acre agricultural space located at EcoVillage at Ithaca, featuring a school vegetable garden and a community-supported agriculture program with u-pick berries. In addition to expanding the size and capacity of the farm, the grant also aimed to boost local procurement efforts for the school's free Farm to School breakfast and lunch program, and to increase education and internship opportunities for our students related to farming, local foods, and agriculture. While this grant concluded in June 2025, the school's farm continues to operate, providing organically grown produce to the school's lunch program and providing educational activities and field trips for students.

In 2025:
We grew 50 pounds of produce that were used in the school's farm-to-school lunch program, which is free to all students and staff
50 community members joined the berry CSA program in 2025
20 students participated in hands-on, paid internships with the school's farm program

During the grant period, New Roots developed a partnership with local nonprofit The Learning Web. The Learning Web supported our student farming internship program by funding a portion of our paid internship positions for students, which proved to be very popular among students. Interns worked on planting, weeding, harvesting, berry plant pruning and maintenance, and sold produce at local farmers markets.

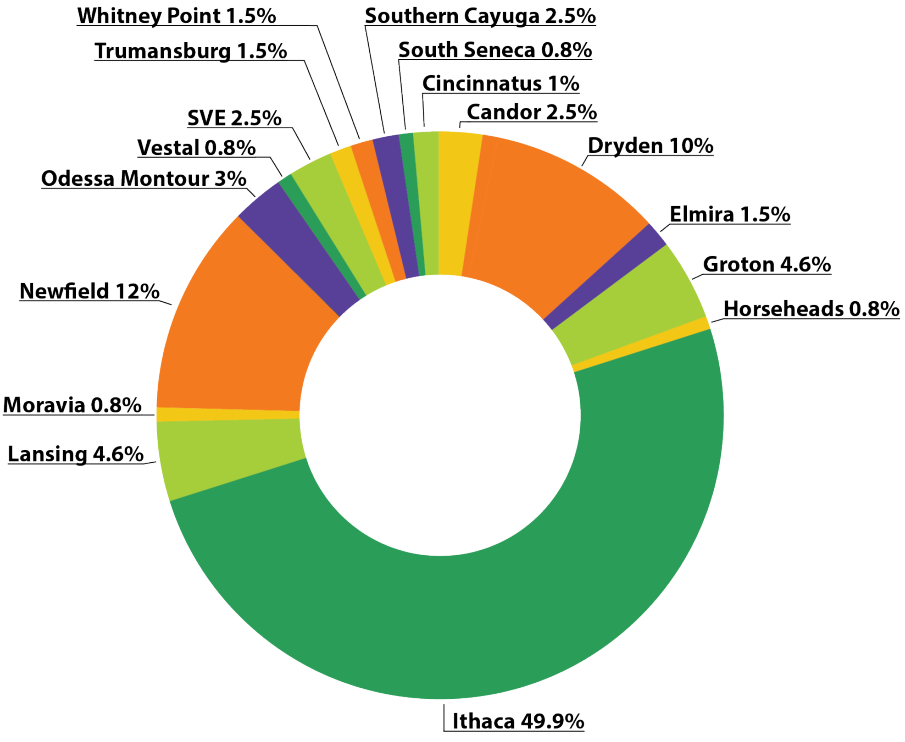
**"New Roots accommodated my vegan dietary needs, making me home cooked lunches every day, and even delivering them to our doorstep during the pandemic." - *Emi Stockwell, New Roots Alum***

| Graduation Year | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4-year Graduation Rate | 91% (2019 cohort) | 81% (2020 cohort) | 93% (2021 cohort) |

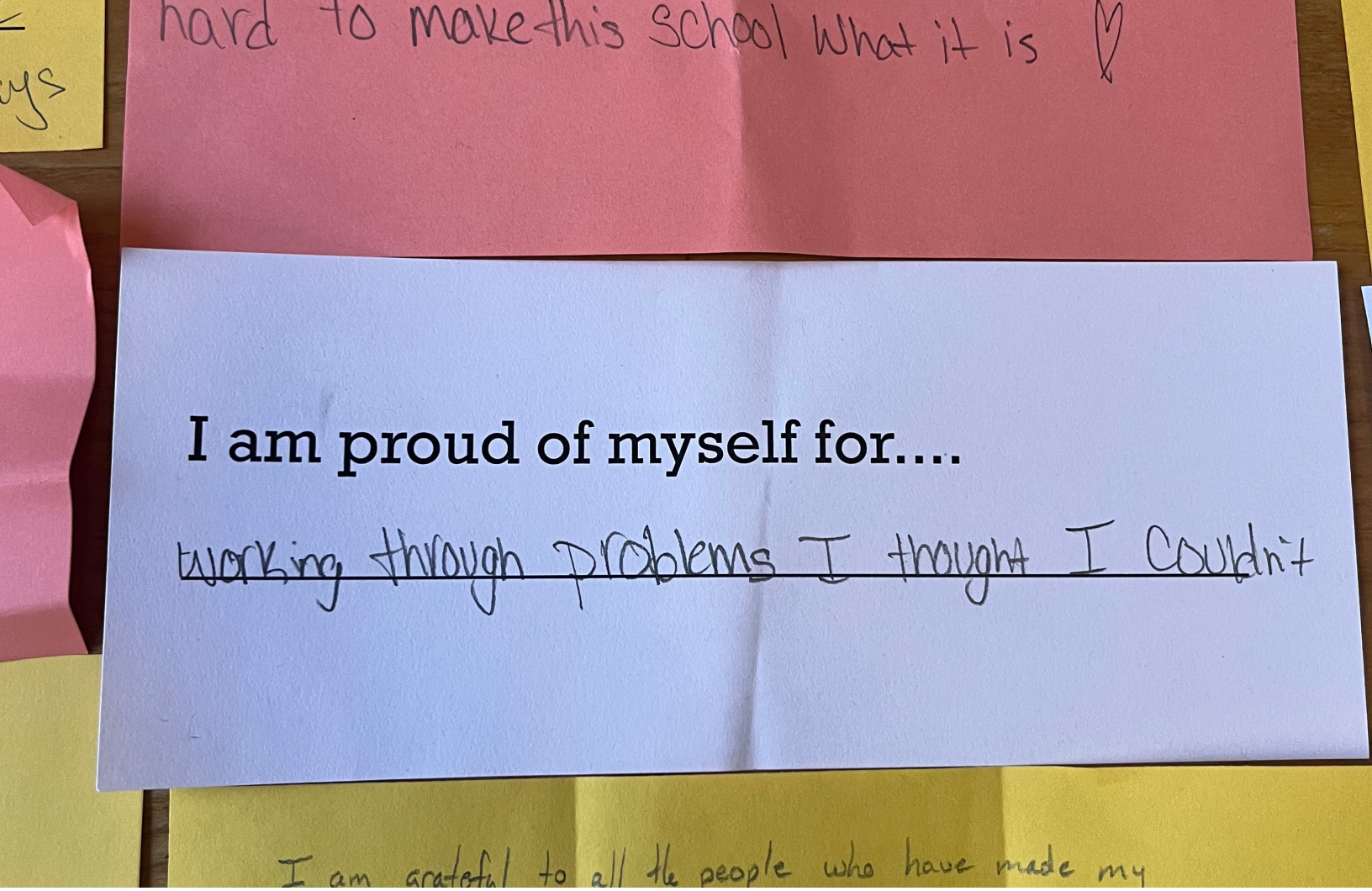
# NEW ROOTS BY THE NUMBERS

| Year | Total Number of College Credits Earned by Graduating Class | Average Number of College Credits Earned Per Graduate |
|---|---|---|
| 2025 | 677 | 18.4 |
| 2024 | 313 | 14.2 |
| 2023 | 246 | 10.7 |

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS BY SCHOOL DISTRICT




## NUMBER OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS REPRESENTED: 17




## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS AND SPONSORS!

In 2025, donations and/or grants from the following organizations supported our work:

**Tompkins County Community Recovery Fund**
**USDA Food and Nutrition Services**
**Park Foundation**
**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**
**Blick Art Supplies**
**Ithaca Rotary Foundation**
**Wegmans**
**Whole Kids Foundation**
**Human Services Coalition**

## DONATION INFORMATION

Would you like to make a financial gift to support New Roots Charter School? Any amount, no matter how small, makes a difference! Donations are tax-deductible. Please make checks payable to New Roots Charter School and mail to: PO Box 936, Ithaca, NY 14851. Thank you!

Interested In Learning More About New Roots?

Learn more, schedule a tour, or come to an open house or upcoming community event! Visit www.newrootsschool.org

SCAN TO LEARN MORE



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