



**Launching Educational Assistance Programs Forward, Inc.,  
20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
*“Beyond Education – Thriving in Difficult Times”*

Dear Friends,

On July 26, 2021, LEAP Forward, Inc., will celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As you might imagine, we are extremely grateful to be marking this milestone. To help commemorate 20 years of commitment to serving students, we will document our journey in a formal publication that highlights our illustrious accomplishments. I will say more about the document shortly. Before I do, I want to give you some background information on how we arrived at this point.

Our first miracle was Mr. Wallace Leeper, the high school guidance counselor, who helped me **and more than 20** African American students set our sights on pursuing an engineering degree. Most of us did not have a clue as to what an engineer did for a profession. For me, in particular, the decision to become an engineer was life defining and life changing. To honor Mr. Leeper’s excellence in guidance and his commitment to serving his students, I formed LEAP Forward, Inc., and then, I enlisted the assistance of other engineers Mr. Leeper guided.

Our second miracle was around July 9, 2001. Our package was sent to the IRS to establish LEAP Forward, Inc., as a viable 501(c)(3) nonprofit. On July 19, 2001, we received an acknowledgment letter confirming receipt and started the process with the note, “120 days to review.”

However, on July 26, 2001, another miracle occurred when we received our official Form 1045 confirming LEAP Forward as a nonprofit organization. Not one question was asked, and approval was received in record time – **less than two weeks**. What did they see in our package that confirmed our presence in the lives of many underserved youth? They saw that with a few hands we were going to schools and talking about STEM careers, taking our youth out of their rural environment to colleges and universities, and helping students financially with the purchase of college books. Without a doubt, they saw that we were dedicated and committed. Our mission was clear – to serve our youth.

**As we fast forward to today, we are proud to say that we have promoted our mission vigorously.** Over our 20 years of service, we have been the light in the community that cares

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and goes above and beyond what is expected to show our youth that they, in fact, do matter. We are so proud of our activities and programs; they are changing lives, influencing expectations, and helping to make dreams come true. Here is a partial list of what we have been doing.

We provided STEM presentations and exhibits to educate and give our students exposure, and we taught and demonstrated STEM through hands-on activities. We toured industries. We initiated award-winning STEM competition teams. We received the NSBE Jr. National Chapter of the Year Awards in 2017 and 2018. Additionally, our teams have garnered over 25 STEM competition awards. We opened the door to conference attendance, giving some students their first-time airplane trip and traveling experiences outside of their rural county. We mentored and we tutored. We provided encouragement and motivation. We advocated for students at local schools, colleges, and universities. We taught classes on resume preparation and interview skills. We supported and helped seek internships and career employment. We also taught leadership skills and provided leadership opportunities. We helped with the college admissions process by paying application and exam fees. We helped complete financial aid forms. We conducted college tours in and out of state to Bowie, UMES, TSU, Howard, NSU, PENN, NCA&T, Hampton, Harvard, PITT, UMCP, UMBC, Morgan, JCSU, UNCC, to name a few. We provided scholarships to over 200 students. We published a book and made it available to students to enhance their college experiences. We exposed youth to African American history and culture by taking them on trips and displayed a Black art and history exhibit in local schools to educate hundreds of students, teachers, and the community. We inspired and motivated youth to learn, give their best, and achieve excellence. And yet, it still isn't enough. **We can, and we must, do more.**

As we look Beyond Education – we see how the past year has changed life, as we knew it. So many adjustments were made and yet we thrived in difficult times. It wasn't easy for our students or for this nonprofit.

For our efforts over our 20 years, we achieved recognition and awards, but the greatest reward is being allowed to make a difference in young lives. From our labor, we see productive young men and women enter careers as engineers, lawyers, teachers, accountants, and business owners. Our impact is undeniable. Yes, “**Beyond Education – Thriving in Difficult Times.**”

I believe Mr. Leeper would be extremely proud of our accomplishments. We have continued what he started – a rich legacy of providing 20 years of commitment and service to youth. Celebrate this momentous occasion with us, and help us record more outstanding history. We invite you to be part of our work to help our youth **Learn, Excel, Achieve, Perform, Explore, and Rise!** We are requesting your sponsorship of our 20<sup>th</sup> commemoration, placement of an ad in our program booklet, or your donation of an individual \$20 contribution. The AD Request Form, along with additional information, is attached. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

In gratitude,

*Rhonda Thomas*  
President and Founder