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**BELIEVE.
EXPECT.
ACHIEVE.**



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PARTNERING FOR
STUDENT SUCCESS

LETTER FROM TINA

I'm currently reading *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, by adrienne maree brown. Brown's big idea is that by leaning into change, which is constant, we can shape the future in which we want to live.

Wow, does this resonate.

We experienced another year of dramatic change at Achieve Atlanta, but I'm proud to say that our team and community rallied, yet again, to realize our vision of a future where race and income no longer predict postsecondary success or upward mobility.

Over the last year, we've all continued to live in the shadow of fear and uncertainty. But we also have recognized that we don't have to keep playing defense against the psychological and physical fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like the virus, we've adapted. To support our Scholars, Achieve Atlanta is offering free, confidential, short-term counseling for those who are dealing with personal difficulties. We continue to provide emergency grants of up to \$500 to help them remain enrolled in postsecondary education when facing unexpected financial challenges. And, we're exploring how to best support graduates' transitions to the workforce.

To support our team, we've implemented flexible schedules, made consensus-based COVID protocol decisions, and named "extending grace" as one of our unofficial values during this time. We understand that people's lives are still being upended and have committed to standing in the gap for one another until we can find stable ground again.

As we've regained our footing, we have continued our core work and are seeing outcomes starting to bounce back. Our Scholars are earning their degrees at rates similar to students of all income levels, and most are doing so with far less debt than their peers. Although we still have a lot of work to do to reach our vision, we are emerging from the pandemic era with a renewed sense of collective power and sense of what's possible for our young people.

While we can't and shouldn't minimize the traumatic effects of living through COVID-19, we can acknowledge the work we've done to process the grief and learn from our collective suffering. With the hard-earned resilience and growth we've accumulated, we will continue working every day to shape a future of opportunity for our young people and for our city.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Tina Fernandez
Executive Director
Achieve Atlanta



ABOUT
**ACHIEVE
ATLANTA**

Achieve Atlanta envisions an Atlanta where race and income no longer predict postsecondary success and upward mobility. In service of this vision, Achieve Atlanta's mission is to help Atlanta Public Schools (APS) students access, afford, and earn postsecondary credentials.

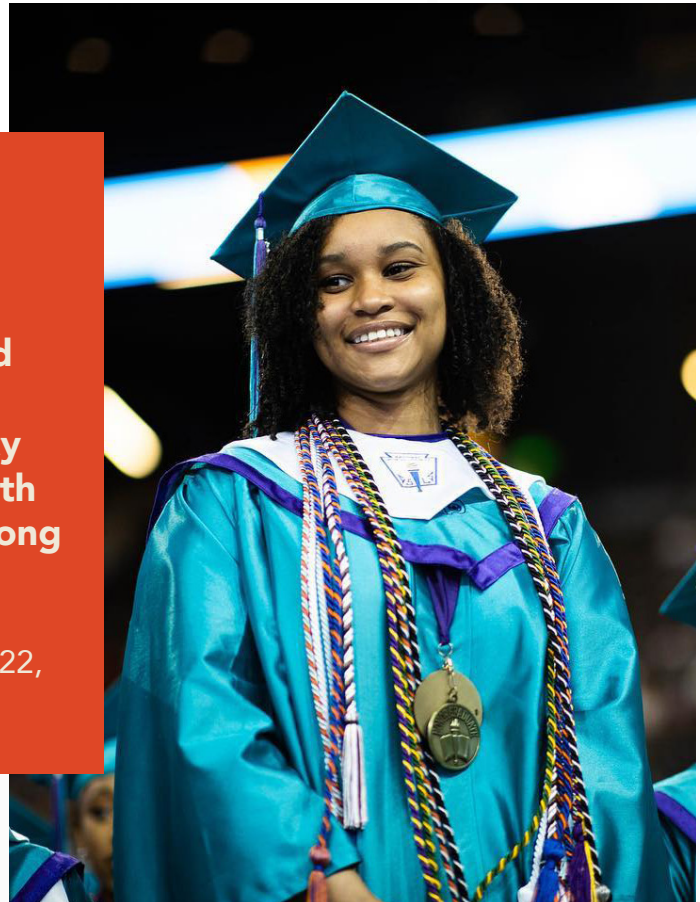
Just as important as what we do is how we approach our work. Achieve Atlanta believes that to solve the complex problem of low degree attainment we must work across organizations and sectors. Therefore, we catalyze and facilitate results-driven, cross-sector collaboration by setting a vision, assembling teams, and creating conditions for success across a range of partners—including Atlanta Public Schools, numerous colleges and universities, nonprofit and community organizations, and, most importantly, students and families.

ACHIEVE ATLANTA SCHOLARSHIP

The Achieve Atlanta Scholarship launched in 2016 with a cohort of nearly 600 Scholars. Now entering our seventh year, we have served more than 4,400 Scholars who have attended college at more than 300 higher education institutions across the country!

"Achieve Atlanta has provided me with the best resources that helped me during my four-year college experience. Not only did they provide financial support with scholarships and emergency grants, but they supplied me with a college coach who I built a strong bond with. Thank you, Achieve Atlanta, for everything!"

—Jazzmyne, Valdosta State University '22,
Maynard H. Jackson High School '18



OUR SCHOLARS



4,463

Achieve Atlanta
Scholars since
our founding

More than

\$40
million



in scholarship funds paid
out through spring 2022



of graduating
Atlanta Public
Schools seniors
become Scholars



94%

of Scholars are
Black or Latinx



96%

are eligible for
Pell Grants



are first-generation
college students

Our Scholars have pursued:

78% Bachelor's Degree

19% Associate Degree

3% Technical Degree



SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

ABOUBACAR BARRIE

Georgia Tech, Class of 2023
D.M. Therrell High School, 2020 Cohort

As a first-generation college student born in Guinea, Aboubacar Barrie has always been a self-starter who is determined to achieve his dreams. He moved to the United States at age 5 and to Atlanta at age 10. His parents were not formally educated, but they sacrificed and worked hard to provide a better life and educational opportunities for Aboubacar and his siblings.

When Aboubacar was applying to colleges during his senior year of high school, he did not originally plan to apply to Georgia Tech. However, his cousin — who was an Achieve Atlanta Scholar at Georgia Tech—encouraged him to apply. After also hearing about the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship from his counselors, he decided it was worth a try. The following March, Georgia Tech’s admissions office set up a surprise acceptance announcement event for several D.M. Therrell High School students, including Aboubacar. They shared the news in person, with their parents and friends in the room.

Aboubacar is thriving at Georgia Tech, where he is studying business administration and marketing, with a minor in engineering. He is involved with campus programs, including serving in the African American Student Union, offering tutoring to his peers, and working as an Achieve Atlanta Ambassador—helping ensure other Achieve Atlanta Scholars feel connected and supported during their college experience.

After graduation, Aboubacar plans to work for a technology company in a business-related position, continue to expand his apparel company, and find ways to give back to other first-generation college students.

“Go out and explore—meet new people and make connections to help you get to great places.”

—Aboubacar Barrie



WHAT WE'RE
LEARNING

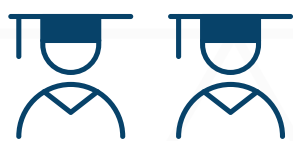
We use research-backed strategies to achieve our mission of increasing the number of APS college graduates. Over the past seven years, we have formed partnerships and implemented action plans to achieve positive outcomes for APS students and our Scholars.

ACHIEVE ATLANTA SCHOLARS

CLOSING FINANCIAL GAPS

For a second year, we surveyed a sample of Scholars to learn about their financial situations. In addition to answering questions about their financial wellness, they submitted financial aid award letters and estimates of other school-related expenses. This year's responses highlighted the challenge of affording the full cost of college as well as how financial aid packages vary across the myriad institutions in which our students enroll.

We found that the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship closes financial gaps for many students. In fact, half of Scholars have no remaining unmet financial need once the scholarship is combined with other grants, federal loans, and the federal government's estimate of their ability to pay. On the other hand, we also learned:



61%

of Scholars reported facing two or more financial challenges (up from 54% last year)



1 in 4

Scholars struggled to buy textbooks

Scholars enrolled at out-of-state public institutions tend to have

HIGHER

unmet need compared to Scholars at private or in-state public institutions

The findings point to the continued importance of the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship, as well as supplemental aid including emergency and completion grants. In addition, this research highlights the need for Achieve Atlanta and our partners to start the college affordability conversation earlier in students' college planning journeys and help ensure students have plans to cover all of their costs.

CONNECTING SCHOLARS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Last spring, Gallup-Lumina's annual State of Higher Education report found that more than one-third of college students considered taking a break last year. Of those, 71% cited emotional stress as one of the most important reasons, an increase of more than 35 percentage points from the prior year. Both our high school and college partners are reporting a similar uptick in students facing mental health challenges, including increased referrals to mental health services.

With this in mind, we expanded outreach efforts to ensure Achieve Atlanta Scholars and their immediate family members were aware of our Student Assistance Program, which provides free, confidential, short-term counseling for those facing personal difficulties. In addition, our College Ambassadors—peer leaders we identify at our 10 partner campuses—help new Achieve Atlanta Scholars adjust to campus, meet other Scholars, and connect with campus support resources.

ACHIEVE ATLANTA ALUMNI

APPLYING A CROSS-SECTOR TEAMING APPROACH TO HELP GRADUATES TRANSITION TO THE WORKFORCE

For our first six years, our primary focus was increasing postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion. That focus remains, but as we surpassed 500 graduates last year, we began hearing from students and partners that many were struggling to make a strong first step into their career. It became clear that accomplishing our vision of not just postsecondary success, but also upward mobility, may involve preparing students for, and supporting students as they transition to the workforce.

With that goal in mind, we applied our cross-sector teaming approach to better understand and act on this challenge. We invited experts from Braven, Georgia Chamber, Georgia State University, Metro Atlanta Chamber, and Spelman College to join a peer workgroup to collaborate on designing solutions to this challenge.

In the coming months, this group will develop and implement an action plan to help Scholars gain employment in their chosen career paths and earn compensation that reflects their achievements.

SURVEYING ALUMNI TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THEIR EXPERIENCE AND EMPLOYMENT SITUATIONS

In parallel with the peer workgroup, we surveyed alumni to understand their current employment status and get feedback on how we could have better supported their transition from college. We found that:



40%

of respondents were either underemployed or working in a job unrelated to their intended career path



22%

were unemployed

less than half reported earning a

SALARY

that provides for their basic needs

These data provide an important baseline for the work ahead, and these outcomes are similar to what many first-generation students are experiencing nationally.

PILOTING BRAVEN'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM WITH SECOND-YEAR SCHOLARS

Even as we collaborate across organizations and sectors to develop systemic solutions for our Scholars, we are also pursuing opportunities to pilot some strategies internally. In response to our learnings about Scholars' struggles with their transitions to the workforce, we established a pilot program with Braven to support 50 second-year Scholars. These Scholars will participate in Braven's 15-week, online career development program this fall. In addition, they will explore their values and career interests, refine their resumes and LinkedIn profiles, build their professional networks, and complete a capstone project. Scholars who complete the program will receive a stipend. We're eager to learn how well this type of programming can propel our Scholars into strong first jobs.

ACHIEVE ATLANTA GRADUATE PROFILES



ISIAH ANDERSON

Georgia State University, Class of 2022

Major: Journalism

APS High School: D.M. Therrell High School

Next steps: Pursuing a career in acting/filmmaking and launching a podcast

"Achieve Atlanta has been extremely instrumental in supplying me with the financial assistance to fulfill my collegiate obligations. As a first-generation college student, my journey has been far from easy, but Achieve Atlanta's help has been the icing on the cake for me to do great things beyond my university experience. Thank you, Achieve Atlanta!"



EARLINE BENNETT

University of West Georgia, Class of 2021

Major: Elementary Education

APS High School: Booker T. Washington High School

Next steps: Working as a teacher and head volleyball coach for Douglas County Schools; recently opened a hair braiding salon

"With the right resources, drive, and effort, anything is possible... even breaking generational curses. Thank you, Achieve Atlanta, for making it possible!"



KETURAH BUTLER-REED

Albany State University, Class of 2021

Major: English, with a minor in Professional Writing

APS High School: Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy

Next steps: Working as a regional organizer for the Black Voters Matter Fund in Louisiana

"I want to thank Achieve Atlanta for playing such an integral role in my collegiate career; from the financial support to the mentorship, I am incredibly appreciative!"



GLEN TERRY

Fort Valley State University, Class of 2022

Major: Marketing

APS High School: Benjamin E. Mays High School

Next steps: Working as a full-time photographer with hopes of opening a photography studio soon

"I'm graduating Magna Cum Laude (3.7 GPA), and thanks to Achieve Atlanta I'm graduating debt free. I want to thank my Beyond 12 coaches for calling and checking up on me throughout my college journey."



JANCY VÁSQUEZ

Georgia State University, Class of 2022

Major: English, with a minor in Communication Sciences Disorder

APS High School: Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy

Next steps: Entering graduate school to pursue an audiology career

"I've had so many unique experiences at Georgia State University, and I am grateful to have met so many amazing people and be part of even greater organizations."



AUSTIN MORRIS

Kennesaw State University, Class of 2021

Major: Sport Management

APS High School: North Atlanta High School

Next steps: Working for the NBA as a digital content publisher, editor & SEO analyst for Cox Automotive, and co-founder of UnitedMarket

"Thank you, Achieve Atlanta, for your generosity and for contributing to my college success and my success in the future."



JAMRYA Y. WILKERSON

Fort Valley State University, Class of 2022

Major: Social Work

APS High School: Booker T. Washington High School

Next steps: Working for the Georgia College Advising Corps as a college adviser at D.M. Therrell High School

"Thank you, Achieve Atlanta, for the help over the years—I am really thankful."



GRADUATE SPOTLIGHT

MARKALA HALL

Spelman College, Class of 2022
D.M. Therrell High School, 2018 Cohort

From the time Markala Hall was in elementary school, she knew she would go to college. Her original goal was to attend an out-of-state college, but after a weekend on Spelman College's campus, she realized she had found her dream school. After exploring a range of career options, Markala decided to major in economics with a minor in management and organization.

During her time at Spelman, Markala participated in the AWM Math Club, the Economics Club, and the NAACP Education Committee. She also worked as an Achieve Atlanta Ambassador where she fostered a welcoming environment for Scholars to connect with one another. Through the experience, she learned new interpersonal and leadership skills—like public speaking and time management—while becoming what she describes as a “better version” of herself.

Markala plans to explore working in real estate. Because of Achieve Atlanta's impact on her college journey, she also wants to start a nonprofit organization focused on helping students learn necessary skills like FAFSA completion and resume writing.



“My advice to students is to be proactive in college. Take advantage of every opportunity that you can.”

—Markala Hall



SINCE OUR FIRST COHORT
ENTERED COLLEGE SIX
YEARS AGO,



955
SCHOLARS

HAVE EARNED A
DEGREE OR CREDENTIAL

**As of September 2022*

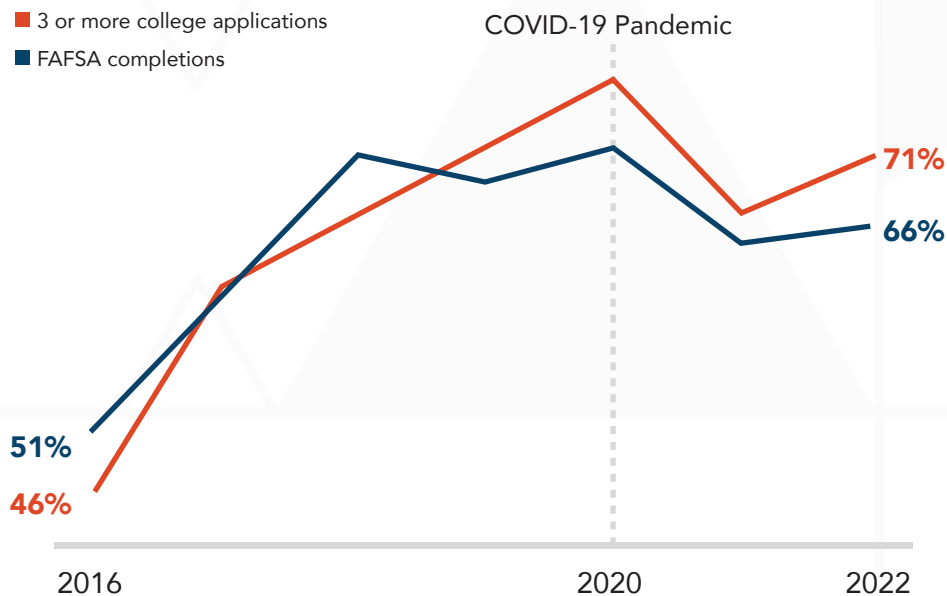


OUR IMPACT

POSTSECONDARY ACCESS OUTCOMES

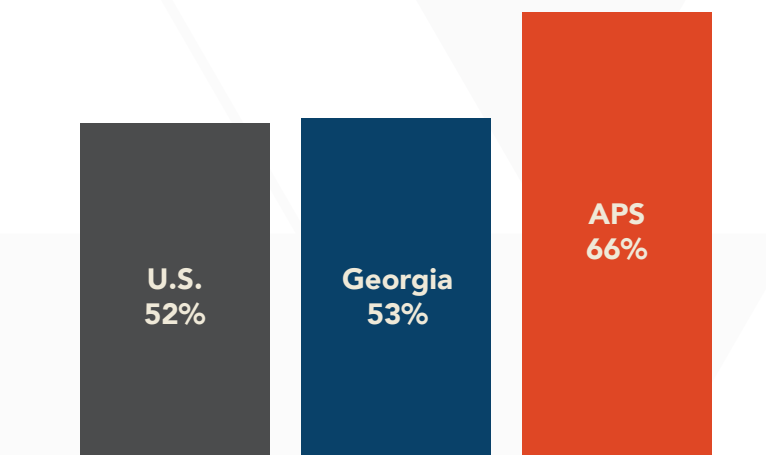
After a pandemic drop in 2021, FAFSA completions and college applications trended upward during 2022. While still lower than pre-pandemic years, both are still well above our first year (2015–2016). And, our FAFSA completion rate continues to outpace state and national rates.

FAFSA and College Applications Since Achieve Atlanta's Founding



Source: District-level FAFSA and college application tracking; total as of June for each cohort. Percentage of enrolled 12th grade students.

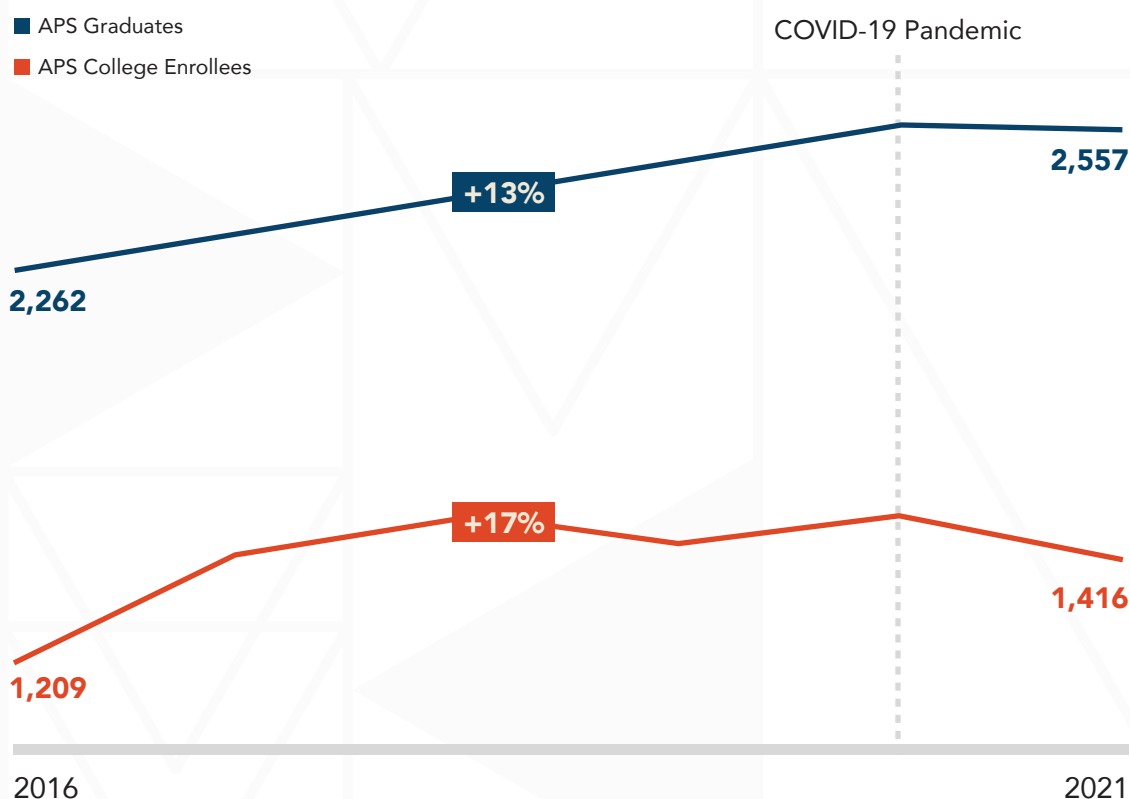
Atlanta Public Schools FAFSA Completion Outpaces the State and Nation



Source: Nation and Georgia data as of July 1, 2022 from Federal Student Aid, accessed via Form Your Future. APS data as of June 30, 2022 from Federal Student Aid and College Advising Corps monthly tracking.

As with FAFSA and college applications, seamless college enrollment dropped for the class of 2021 after a slight increase for the class of 2020. This differs from national trends, which saw seamless college enrollment fall in both years. Since 2019, seamless enrollment nationally is down by 5.2%; it fell 2.7% for APS students. Given the slight bounceback in FAFSA and college applications for the class of 2022, we expect seamless enrollment to follow a similar trend once data for that class become available in spring 2023.

The Number of High School Graduates and College Enrollees Have Increased Since Achieve Atlanta's Founding

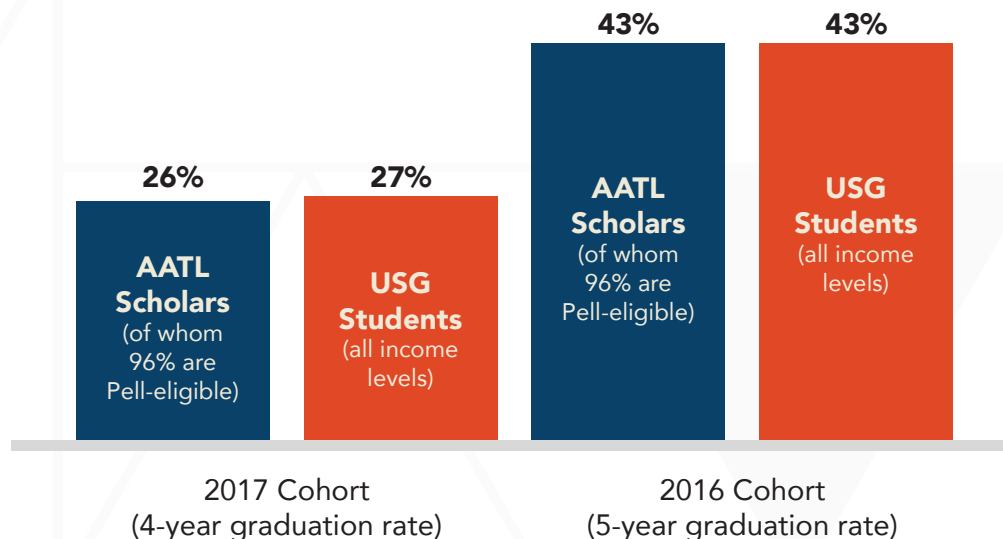


Source: APS Graduates is the count of high school graduates by cohort. APS College Enrollees is the count of cohort graduates who enroll in college by the fall semester after graduation.

POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS OUTCOMES

Despite the struggles brought on by the pandemic during the past couple of years, our Scholars are earning degrees at rates similar to students of all income levels. Their degree attainment rate is a testament to the resilience of our Scholars and their families, and the dedication of our staff and partners to equitable college access and success.

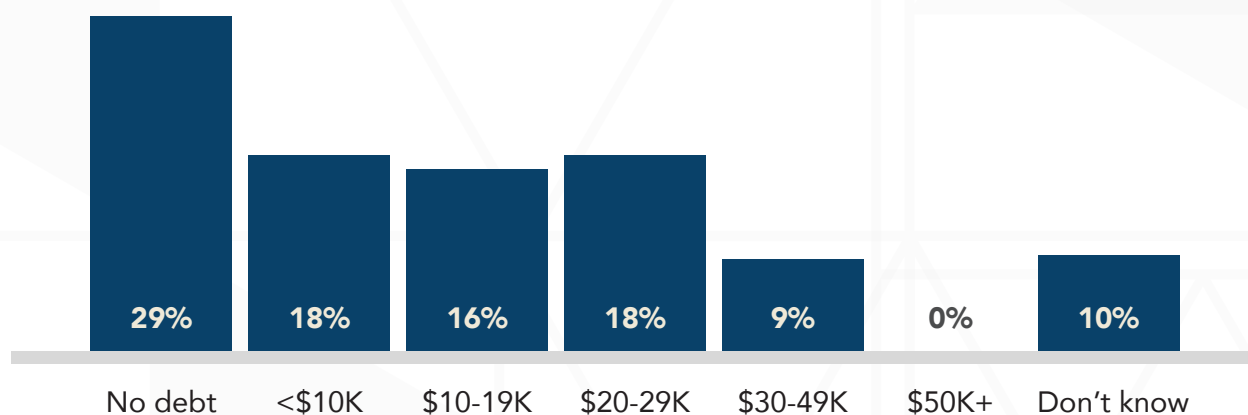
Achieve Atlanta (AATL) College Graduation Rates Compared to University System of Georgia (USG) Students of All Income Levels



*USG graduation rate as of fall 2021 term for full-time, first-time students by institution who graduated in any USG institution. Rates are weighted by the proportion of Achieve Atlanta Scholars attending each institution. Comparison by socioeconomic status is not publicly available. 72% of Scholars attended USG institutions; 97% are Pell-eligible. Source: USG by the Numbers Report.

In addition to graduating at rates similar to peers of all income levels, Achieve Atlanta Scholars tend to graduate with less debt, in many cases well below the state average. Nearly half of graduates we surveyed had debt below \$10k.

Achieve Atlanta Scholar Debt Upon Graduation (Bachelor's)



*33% of 214 AATL Scholars who graduated in spring or summer 2021 responded to closeout survey. Values above are self-reported. Associate/technical degree recipients excluded for sake of comparison but generally having low debt.

\$27,759
Average debt of all 2019-2020 Georgia Graduates*

*Student Debt and the class of 2020 Institute for College Access & Success.
16th Annual Report. November 2021. Debt data for 2021 graduates not yet available.

We applaud the Biden administration's decision to cancel up to \$20,000 in student loan debt for Americans. Most Achieve Atlanta Scholars are Pell Grant recipients, and this action will have a positive impact on their current and future lives. The debt cancellation removes barriers to social mobility for graduates, while also providing a lifeline for students who have debt but were unable to complete their degree.

Achieve Atlanta continues to advocate for systemic reforms—including expansion of need-based financial aid and enactment of the Biden administration's proposed changes to income-driven repayment—to make college affordable for current and future students.

2021-2022 HIGHLIGHTS



For the past two years, we have provided completion grants to Scholars who have exhausted Achieve Atlanta eligibility but were within two terms of earning their degree. We provided these grants because some Scholars experienced interruptions and needed more time to complete their degrees or certificates. More than 80% of these recipients earned their degrees by the intended term. Based on this success, the Atlanta-based **Tull Charitable Foundation** celebrated its 70th anniversary by granting us \$700,000 to fund completion grants for the 2022-2023 academic year.



Scholar Night is an annual event where we introduce APS seniors to what it means to become Achieve Atlanta Scholars, provide tips on transitioning to college, and connect them with coaches who will support them. This spring, we hosted an in-person option for the first time since 2019. Around 150 seniors and their families joined us safely in person at **Maynard Jackson High School** and more than 450 participated online.



Achieve Atlanta Ambassadors are peer leaders at our 10 partner campuses who help new Achieve Atlanta Scholars adjust to campus, meet other Scholars, and connect with campus support resources. The majority of our Ambassadors are young women, but this year we are happy to report that we have increased the proportion of male Ambassadors from 20% to 35%, which will widen the perspective for Scholar engagement efforts and increase on-campus peer leadership representation.



On July 7, 2022, we celebrated our **seventh anniversary** as an organization!

Our team has grown to 20 full-time employees and several interns as we continue to work toward accomplishing our mission and vision in Atlanta.



**LOOKING
AHEAD**

At Achieve Atlanta, our work is not done until Atlanta is a city where race and income no longer predict postsecondary success and upward mobility. The pandemic pushed us to adapt and serve our students in new and different ways. As we recover, our work with students is more important than ever. Here are some highlights as we look to the year ahead:

PLANNING FOR ACHIEVE ATLANTA'S FUTURE

In the coming months, we will kick off a strategic planning process that will engage students, staff, partners, and stakeholders to chart how we can best execute on our mission and vision over the next three years. We will look to strengthen our core work while also exploring how we can best support Scholars' mental health and graduates' transitions to a strong first job.

PROMISING EXTERNAL EVALUATION OUTCOMES

A soon-to-be-released independent analysis conducted by Georgia State University's Georgia Policy Labs finds that Achieve Atlanta's scholarship and support services have increased students' ability to persist in college and earn their degree, compared to similar students who did not become Achieve Atlanta Scholars. A full report will be released later this fall.

MACKENZIE SCOTT GIFT

In summer 2022, Achieve Atlanta received an \$8 million unrestricted gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. This gift will help support Achieve Atlanta's efforts to increase the number of Atlanta students graduating from college. This donation will also strengthen the relationship between Achieve Atlanta and our partners.

NEW RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP WITH GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In April, we jointly received a grant with GSU's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies to form a three-year research-practice partnership. Funded by the W.T. Grant, Spencer, and Doris Duke foundations, the grant will fund work to evaluate, understand, and improve some of our existing programs, with a specific focus on student financial wellness. We will also focus on developing new evidence-based policies, procedures, and programs to serve all AATL Scholars and reduce inequality in student debt outcomes.



**PARTNERING
FOR STUDENT
SUCCESS**

Our work serving APS students and our Scholars is only made possible through strong partnerships with colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic organizations. We thank them for another year of partnership that made an impact.

OUR PARTNERS



ACHIEVE ATLANTA STAFF



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Executive Director

Jennifer Pitre
Executive Assistant to
the Executive Director

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College Success

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