



2024

IMPACT REPORT





"Achieve Atlanta has become a community that has always been in my corner and rooting for me to succeed. The relationships and connections I've built have taught me that you always lead with compassion and pour into others the same way they've poured into you."

-Linda (Benjamin E. Mays High School '20, UGA '24)



LETTER FROM CHERYL

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As I reflect on Achieve Atlanta's remarkable journey over the past year, my heart swells with gratitude for the profound impact we have made together with our Scholars and partners.

This summer, I experienced the bittersweet joy of sending my youngest child off to college—a moment filled with both fear and excitement. As a career educator and the President/Executive Director of Achieve Atlanta, I thought I was prepared, but nothing compares to this personal milestone. Amidst the whirlwind of filling out forms and discussing majors and clubs, I couldn't help but acknowledge that my baby was leaving home. While I played an instrumental role in preparing him for this new chapter, I knew he would have to forge his path and build a support network on campus.

I found comfort in knowing he wasn't alone; one of his best friends, an Achieve Atlanta Scholar, was embarking on this journey alongside him. Together, our families have become partners in ensuring our sons stay on track toward the futures they envisioned for themselves from the very start. This experience highlighted the parallels in our partnership with the Achieve Atlanta community. At the heart of our work is the belief that bringing the right people, resources, and support together can set our Scholars on a pathway to upward mobility. Our theme for 2024-25, "Partnering for Impact," resonates deeply as we celebrate the milestones of the 2023-24 school year within this report and look forward to a bright future.

This fall, we welcomed more than 800 new Scholars, surpassing pre-pandemic numbers. This data point is not just a statistic; it is a testament to the resilience of our community and our unwavering commitment to ensuring that race and income no longer dictate pathways to success. We have now reached 1,846 Achieve Atlanta Scholar graduates, with nearly 2,000 others enrolled this fall, making progress toward their degrees. These Scholars and alumni embody the mission of Achieve Atlanta as they prepare to shatter barriers that once seemed insurmountable.

Despite the challenges posed by changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), our dedicated team collaborated with partners to far exceed state and national FAFSA completion rates. Each obstacle we faced fueled our determination to dismantle the barriers to our students' success. Completing our strategic plan this year laid the groundwork for an even more significant impact as we build on our 2022 evaluation by Georgia Policy Labs. Our Scholars are graduating at rates comparable to their peers of all income levels and are doing so with less debt than those peers—a remarkable achievement that reflects the effectiveness of our approach.

As we deepen our commitment to our core model, we are excited to expand access to meaningful careers and the jobs of tomorrow. Our vision is clear: we want our Scholars to earn postsecondary credentials and embark on a path toward upward mobility.

Our collective achievements thus far are worth celebrating, and they inspire us as we move forward. The strength of Achieve Atlanta lies in our partnerships with organizations and individuals like you, who share our vision and passion for impact. We recognize that with success comes great responsibility, and we are committed to improving the trajectory of students not just in Atlanta but across the state. We're on the right track, and we have more work to do. Together, we remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that every Scholar achieves!

With gratitude and hope,

Cheryl Watson-Harris, Ed.D.
President/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.

OUR CORE VALUES

UNWAVERING BELIEF

An unshakable belief in our students is the inspiration and fuel for everything we do.

CHAMPION FOR STUDENTS

We back our belief in students by acknowledging historical inequities, breaking down systemic barriers, earning students' trust, and building their agency to become their own champions.

EXPECTATION OF EXCELLENCE

We foster a culture of excellence through consistent effort, tenacity, and integrity, resulting in work we can stand behind. It is the standard we set for ourselves and the example we model for our students and community.

INTENTIONAL COLLABORATION

We cannot achieve our vision alone. We deliberately work together internally and build strategic partnerships externally to identify and accomplish shared goals in changing environments.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

We are constantly learning, remaining curious, and reflecting on our systems, processes, and outcomes to meet our mission. We encourage critical analysis of our work to make thoughtful adjustments, innovate, and take risks to create solutions.

HOW WE STARTED

A 2014 study commissioned by the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta and the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation found that only one in seven Atlanta students entering ninth grade was projected to earn a postsecondary degree (of any kind) within six years of high school graduation. With these findings in mind, the following year the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation provided the financial investment to help create a new organization, Achieve Atlanta, focused on increasing the number of APS students earning a postsecondary credential.

ACHIEVE ATLANTA BY THE NUMBERS

All APS graduates who finish their last two years of high school in Atlanta Public Schools, have at least a 75 GPA, and meet income requirements are eligible. The Scholarship provides \$5,000/year for four years for bachelor's programs and \$1,500/year for two years for associate or technical programs. Scholars must maintain a 2.0 GPA and enroll full time to continue to receive the Scholarship.



5,953

Achieve Atlanta
Scholars since our
founding in 2015

More than
\$57 

million

in Scholarship funds provided
through spring 2024



Scholars have attended

381

different postsecondary
institutions across the country



of graduating
Atlanta Public
Schools seniors
become Scholars



94%

of Scholars are
Black or Latinx



96%

are eligible for
Pell Grants



50%

are first-generation
college students



820

Scholars in the fall
2023 cohort

Our Scholars have pursued:

Bachelor's Degree **80%**

Associate Degree **18%**

Technical Degree **2%**



2023-24 HIGHLIGHTS



In July 2023, we hosted our annual Atlanta Public Schools **College Access Team Launch Training**, where teams from each APS high school collaborated, discussed student needs, and established ambitious goals to support students with college applications, the FAFSA, and other college access milestones for the upcoming year.



In December 2023, Achieve Atlanta hosted its second annual **Homecoming** event at Ponce City Market, with the purpose of building community among Scholars and alumni. Attendees participated in fun activities and learned about postsecondary resources in a relaxed environment.



The Achieve Atlanta team traveled to South Atlanta High School in February 2024 for our inaugural **Team Engagement Day**. We had the pleasure of meeting with inspiring seniors who shared their stories and what they appreciate and need from Achieve Atlanta to support their seamless enrollment into college. Later that day, we visited the Zeist Foundation to deepen our understanding of its place-based philanthropy and the vibrant communities it serves in the Edgewood neighborhood of Atlanta.



Also in February, we publicly announced the addition of the **University of Georgia** as our 11th postsecondary partner, executing targeted programs to ensure students thrive on campus and graduate.



At our March 2024 **Spring Community Breakfast**, “Achieve Atlanta’s Impact: Sharing Our Progress and Vision for the Future,” community members and partners got an inside look at our goals and outcomes. This event served as an amazing opportunity for our students, peers, and guests to share their stories and learn how they tie into our mission and vision for Atlanta’s future.



In the spring of 2024, more than 750 students, family members, and other guests attended one of our **Scholar Night** events, held at Drew Charter School and Benjamin E. Mays High School. APS seniors who qualified for the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship were introduced to what it means to become Achieve Atlanta Scholars and received critical information about the Scholarship. This year’s carnival-themed “Achieve Atlanta Land” event allowed students to interact with college and nonprofit partners, play games, and meet the Achieve Atlanta team.



In addition to Scholar Night, Achieve Atlanta hosted several virtual **Scholarship Onboarding and Partner Sessions** throughout the spring to expose students to next steps in the college enrollment process and help ensure they can take advantage of all the support Achieve Atlanta provides during their college journey.



After nine years of service, **Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum**, a founding Achieve Atlanta board member, completed her board term in June 2024. Her invaluable insights and experience have been critical to our success, and we thank her for her contributions.

POSTSECONDARY ACCESS OUTCOMES

Despite the well-documented FAFSA obstacles during the 2023-24 school year, APS students still reached strong outcomes by the end of the academic year with support from Achieve Atlanta, APS, College Advising Corps, and OneGoal.



65%
**OF SENIORS
COMPLETED THE
FAFSA**

This outcome far outpaced the state (40%) and the nation (43%). Achieve Atlanta became a voice in local and national conversations about challenges with the rollout of the new FAFSA and how to best help students navigate the form and process.



58%
**OF APS
GRADUATES
IN 2023**

enrolled in postsecondary education the fall after high school graduation

The annual number of graduates enrolling in college has increased by 139 students since 2015, due to both recent increases in the APS high school graduation rate and Achieve Atlanta's support of college enrollment. Although we won't have enrollment data for the class of 2024 until well into 2025, we expect a modest increase, in alignment with our leading indicators on this page.



79%
OF SENIORS

completed three or more college applications



49%
OF SENIORS

completed our scholarship application

“Achieve Atlanta has supported me in many ways on my collegiate journey—from scholarship assistance and mentorship to career connections and leadership opportunities on my campus. Thanks for everything that you all do for students like myself.”

—Aboubacar (D.M. Therrell High School '20, Georgia Tech '24)





SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

KANIYA FREEMAN

Oglethorpe University '25
Midtown High School '21

Being a first-generation college student has presented unique challenges and opportunities for Kaniya Freeman, a senior at Oglethorpe University. From dealing with a stressful transition to college and unlearning poor study habits to having the opportunity to speak before Oglethorpe University's board of trustees, her journey has been filled with moments of both uncertainty and resilience.

Even with the community she gained at Midtown High School (which introduced her to the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship), Kaniya found herself in numerous situations she and her family had never faced before while trying to figure out the college application process. When talking to her counselor, she learned that Oglethorpe is an Achieve Atlanta partner university, meaning she would receive her scholarship and join a group of students with similar backgrounds to hers.

Since enrolling at Oglethorpe, advisors, peer mentors, and college coaches have helped alleviate the stressors of being a first-generation student. And, connecting with other Scholars has helped Kaniya embrace her identity. As a result, she began not only advocating for the voices of Black students but also the voices of first-generation students across campus.

Kaniya has been a member of the Black Student Caucus and Collegiate 100, as well as

an executive board member for Learning Our Curl Story (LOCS). Currently, she serves as an Achieve Atlanta Ambassador on her campus and an ATL Youth Ambassador under Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens. In these roles, she promotes community among Scholars and encourages youth participation in events and programs throughout the city.

Kaniya believes one of the most rewarding aspects of being a Scholar is the community that comes with it. Once she felt like she had the support she needed to persist, she realized that the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship is more than just a financial boost; it validates her potential and is a testament to the power of opportunity.

"The Scholarship has opened doors I once thought were closed. It has provided me with the resources needed to pursue my dreams. It has demonstrated that hard work and perseverance can indeed pay off—all while building a community where students can find a sense of belonging in an otherwise unfamiliar environment."

—Kaniya

POSTSECONDARY AFFORDABILITY & SUCCESS OUTCOMES

A recently published external evaluation from Georgia State University's Georgia Policy Labs **finds that Achieve Atlanta Scholars earn more credits, attain a higher GPA, and take on less student loan debt than similar students who do not become Scholars. This new research builds upon Georgia Policy Labs' 2022 study, which found Achieve Atlanta Scholars were more likely to remain enrolled compared to similar non-Scholars.**

The study incorporated surveys and focus groups to better understand the benefits of the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship, offering a deeper understanding of how it makes a difference in Scholars health and well-being. They pointed out that the Scholarship improved their college experience because they were less stressed about affording basic needs. With the Scholarship, they could work fewer hours or afford a place to live that was more conducive to learning. They also mentioned that feeling less stressed helped them perform better academically, which the data confirm.

Achieve Atlanta Scholars are



11%

LESS LIKELY

TO TAKE OUT STUDENT LOANS

than similar non-Scholars in their first term

And when they do, they borrow less. This reduction is driven by fewer unsubsidized and PLUS loans, which are loans with the least-favorable terms.

When Achieve Atlanta Scholars use loans to offset the total cost of college attendance, on average they borrow



40%

LESS THAN NON-SCHOLARS

They are also less inclined to take out large loans, thus avoiding substantial debt burdens.

Achieve Atlanta Scholars earn

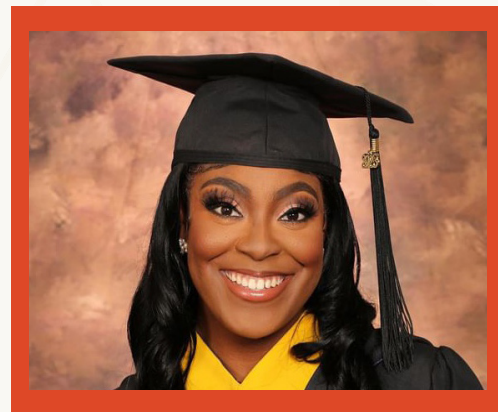


0.75

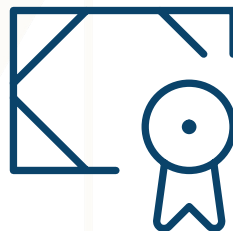
MORE CREDIT HOURS IN THEIR FIRST TERM

than similar non-Scholars, representing an 8% increase

In addition, they do so with a slightly higher GPA than non-Scholars. Since courses are worth three credits, the estimated impact is similar to one in four Achieve Atlanta Scholars passing one more course in their first term than non-Scholars.



Since our first cohort entered college eight years ago



1,846
SCHOLARS

have earned a degree or credential*

*As of September 2024

ACHIEVE ATLANTA

ALUMNI PROFILES



DAISHA AIKENS

Tuskegee University, Class of 2024

Major: Nursing

APS High School: Maynard Holbrook Jackson High School

Next Steps: Passing the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) and participating in a nursing transition program

"Throughout my academic experience, Achieve Atlanta graciously provided financial assistance that contributed to my persistence at Tuskegee University."



GRACE CHOI

Georgia State University, Class of 2024

Major: Neuroscience

APS High School: North Atlanta High School

Next Steps: Traveling abroad while continuing to study and practice in the medical field

"A lot has happened in four years, and I couldn't be more grateful for the support I had throughout this time."



MIKAYLA CONYERS

Howard University, Class of 2024

Major: Criminology

APS High School: Carver Early College

Next Steps: Studying for the LSAT in preparation for law school while completing an internship within the legal/political field

"Achieve Atlanta has supported me throughout my college career by being a financial help to sustain my standing at Howard. This scholarship has not only helped me continue my education, but also offered mentoring to guide me."



DESTINY CRAWFORD

Fort Valley State University, Class of 2024

Major: Agriculture with a concentration in biotechnology

APS High School: Benjamin E. Mays High School

Next Steps: Pursuing a career in the medical field in preparation for graduate school to become a physician assistant

"Achieve Atlanta lessened my worries about the cost of college and helped me focus in class without financial aid being on my mind. Achieve Atlanta has made this young girl from Atlanta's dreams come true as a first-generation college student who graduated debt-free, changing the trajectory of my family. Thank you, Achieve Atlanta, for being there and introducing me to wonderful mentors along the way."



SONYA DANNENBERG

University of Georgia, Class of 2024

Major: Political science with a minor in film studies

APS High School: North Atlanta High School

Next Steps: Applying to law school to study international human rights law while growing her medical- and dental-product distribution businesses

"Achieve Atlanta has immensely guided and supported me throughout my undergraduate journey at the University of Georgia. I am so grateful for Achieve Atlanta's scholarship and mentorship. Achieve Atlanta's guidance helped me succeed at UGA and will continue to help me succeed as I pursue law school!"



TALIYAH HOLLOWAY

Georgia Southern University, Class of 2024

Major: Business administration

APS High School: Midtown High School

Next Steps: Working as an operations supervisor for DHL

"Achieve Atlanta was more than just a scholarship for me! Being an Achieve Atlanta Scholarship recipient, I was given a Beyond 12 coach from the beginning of my college journey until the very end. I was able to talk to someone who was around my age who could provide me with insightful advice and guidance throughout my four years at Georgia Southern. Achieve Atlanta helped not only financially, but also with career preparedness. I couldn't be more thankful!"



CHRIS JONES

Morehouse College, Class of 2024

Major: Business administration with a concentration in finance

APS High School: North Atlanta High School

Next Steps: Relocating to Charlotte, North Carolina, to work as a financial management analyst for Bank of America

"Achieve Atlanta supported my journey by helping me attend my dream school, Morehouse College. Without their support, none of this would be possible."



CHRISTINA PRINCE-WILSON

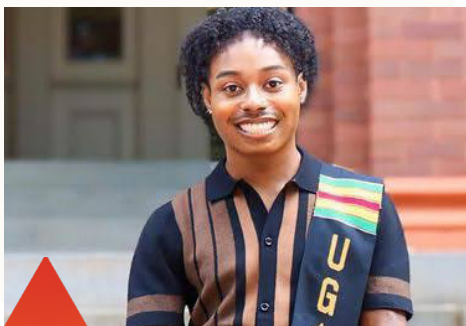
Spelman College, Class of 2024

Major: Political science and pre-law

APS High School: North Atlanta High School

Next Steps: Completing an internship at the Fulton County District Attorney's Office

"Throughout my college journey, Achieve Atlanta has provided invaluable support in numerous ways, including mentorship, career preparation, and scholarship assistance. Thank you for providing me with resources that have empowered me to excel both during my college years and beyond."



TERRELL ROBERTS

University of Georgia, Class of 2024

Major: Political science and history with a minor in philosophy

APS High School: KIPP Atlanta Collegiate

Next Steps: Attending Georgetown University to earn a master's degree in real estate and eventually a J.D.

"Achieve Atlanta supported me in every way I could possibly imagine, including both Drs. Barker (Edu-Tech Enterprises) reaching out consistently to see how I was doing mentally, physically, academically, and emotionally. I'm so grateful for all that Achieve Atlanta has done for me in my collegiate career, and I couldn't imagine what it would be like without them."



LOOKING AHEAD

In March 2024, we completed a three-month process to develop our new three-year strategic plan. The plan outlines an exciting ambition to help us continue progressing toward our vision; it also includes four key pillars that will anchor that work.

OUR AMBITION

Half of high school graduates who are eligible for the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship will earn a postsecondary credential, with at least two-thirds of Scholar graduates on a path to upward mobility.

PILLARS



A strong postsecondary success plan for every Scholar

Effective advising and coaching to support the creation, ownership, and realization of a strong postsecondary plan (to college, through college, and on a path to upward mobility)



Seamless access to resources needed to succeed

Financial, academic, career, and socio-emotional resources are available to and used by Scholars when they need them



An engaged and successful community of Scholars and alumni

A strong brand within Atlanta, a robust Scholar community, and engaged alumni helping each other succeed



A healthy organization

An organization that fosters a healthy culture, grows high-performing and engaged leaders, is fiscally responsible, and enables execution to reach the Ambition

PARTNERING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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

OUR PARTNERS



2023-24 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Claire Arnold (Board Chair), CEO, Leapfrog IT Services

Joe Arnold, Retired Senior Vice President, Not-for-Profit & Government Banking Division, Truist

Luis Avila, Senior Vice President, Corporate Governance and Chief Compliance Officer, Lowe's Companies, Inc.

Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, President Emerita, Spelman College

Dr. Greg Vaughn, Leadership Consultant, Spencer Stuart

Kathy Waller, Executive Director, Atlanta Committee for Progress

2023-24 FUNDERS

Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation
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The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

ECMC Foundation
LuluMa Foundation
Skyline Foundation
Spencer Foundation

William T. Grant Foundation
Yield Giving (MacKenzie Scott)
The Zeist Foundation

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Laura Gangelhoff, Senior Manager, Systems
William Horton, Manager, Data Analysis
Breale Howard, College Success Coach Fellow
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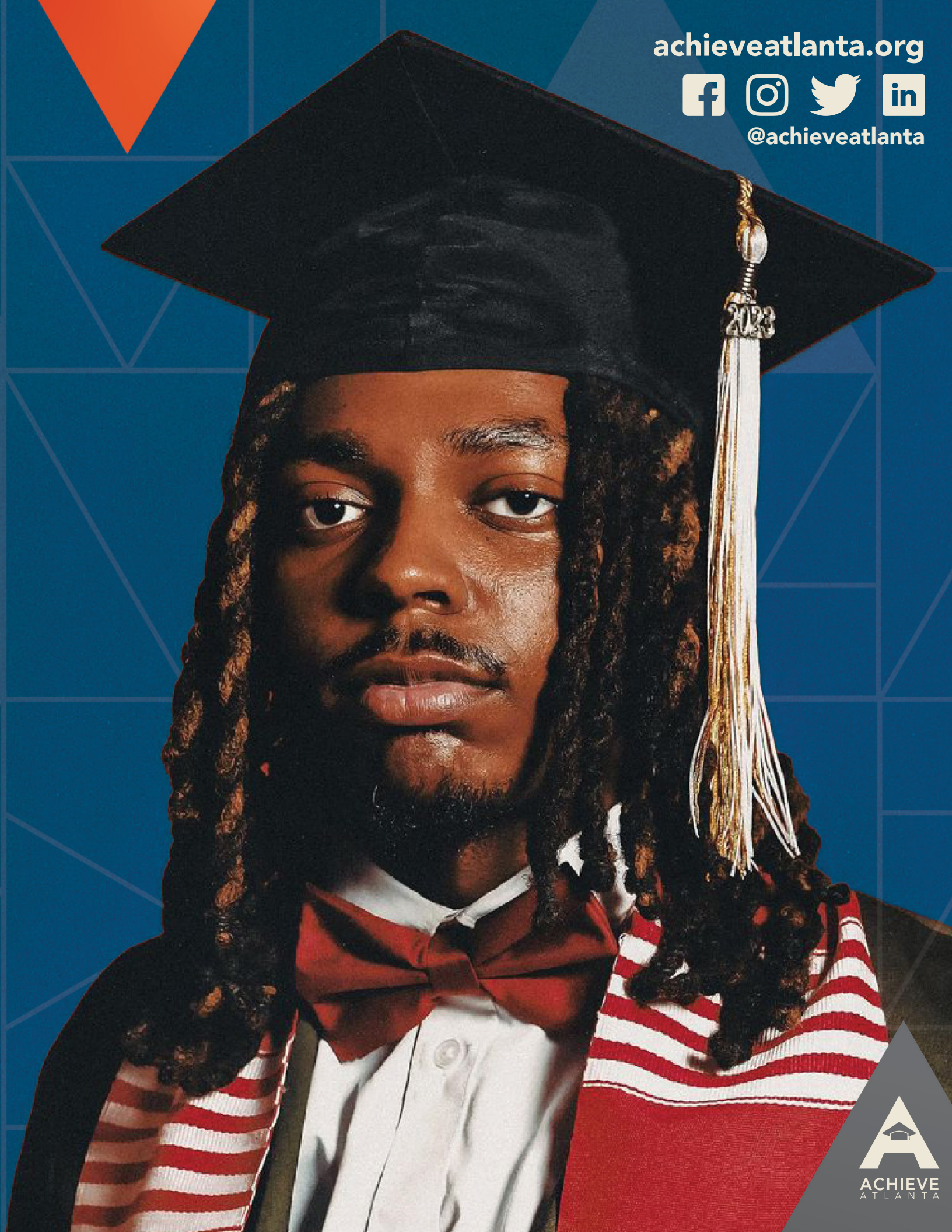
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