



Believe. Expect. Achieve.
*Five Years of Impact for
Atlanta Students*

2020 Impact Report



Booker T. Washington High School

Upon recommendation of the Faculty
We do hereby certify that

Fredrick Avery, Jr.

having completed all requirements prescribed by the Georgia
Board of Education is entitled to receive this

Diploma

By order of the Board of Education of the
City of Atlanta, Georgia

May 23, 2018.



Handwritten signature
Board of Education



Handwritten signature
Superintendent of Schools



Handwritten signature
Mayor of the City of Atlanta

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LETTER FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

I love birthdays.

I've always thrown big parties for milestone birthdays because I know there are only so many moments in life when you get to mark important events with the people you love. For that reason, as we approached Achieve Atlanta's five-year anniversary, I started to plan our celebration. We'd invite our entire community of friends, partners, and supporters. We'd honor our Scholars, especially those who've earned a degree, and we would party! The date was set, the venue was booked, and then, in March, the world changed.



On March 13, that fateful day when we went home due to the state shelter-in-place order, we had no idea what the next few days, weeks, and now months would hold. Within days of leaving our schools and offices, our students left campuses and went home. We were all forced to immediately reconfigure, readjust, and realign our way of working to ensure that the students we serve were able to finish their semester. Our team members and partners accomplished feats never imagined—from working remotely with children tugging at their legs, to battling illness, to caring for others who were sick or lost their job, to grieving for the loss of a loved one.

And then if that wasn't enough to bear, we witnessed the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and countless others. We intimately grieved and grappled with the impacts of the prevalent ideology in our country that Black lives and the lives of people of color are not entitled to the full protection and nurturing of our nation.

For a while, we despaired. We decided to cancel any commemoration of our 5-year anniversary. How could we celebrate amidst so much anguish? But then we saw that despite everything, our partners, counselors, college advisers, teachers, coaches, professors and countless others remained committed to the students we serve and to the notion that the pursuit of an education is a noble pursuit worth protecting. Together, this community helped students secure technology, internet access, and food. It offered hope and comfort to students and did everything it could to help students stay on track to reach their college dreams. And our students showed us over and over again that they are resilient and continue to dream and reach for their personal north stars. They worked from crowded apartments, parking lots, and friend's couches and as of this summer, more than 200 Achieve Atlanta Scholars graduated and earned their degree!

So while it's not the way we envisioned, we are marking this important milestone as a commitment to our Scholars and to our core value of **unwavering belief**. We continue to believe in what's possible for our students. They are the inspiration and fuel for everything we do.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads "Tina".

Tina Fernandez
Executive Director
Achieve Atlanta

Alexes Harris
George Washington University, Class of 2020



OUR STORY

The Crisis

In 2014, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, with support from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation, commissioned a study on postsecondary degree completion for Atlanta Public Schools (APS) students. The study found that, at that time, among students entering 9th grade in APS, only 1 in 7 students were projected to earn a postsecondary degree, of any kind, within six years of their high school graduation.

Why It Matters

Atlanta has one of the highest income inequality rates and lowest social mobility rates in the entire country. In Atlanta, a child born into the lowest economic quintile has less than a four percent chance of moving into the top quintile.¹ Today, kids who are born into poverty in Atlanta will likely stay in poverty their entire lives.

However, research shows that postsecondary degree attainment is an important driver of upward mobility. In Atlanta, those with a bachelor's degree earn more than double the salary as those with only a high school degree.² On top of that, the likelihood of earning a college degree is strongly related to household income. The more money a young person's parents have, the more likely they are to earn a degree. Unless we break this tie between income and educational attainment, economic mobility, especially for our poorest families, is likely to remain out of reach. If that wasn't enough, the economic prosperity of our state depends on our producing more degree holders, especially since by 2025 over 60% of the jobs in Georgia will require some sort of postsecondary degree or credential.³

The Response

In response to this crisis, in 2015, the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation took the extraordinary step of investing to create an organization that would have a laser-like focus on increasing the number of APS students earning a postsecondary credential. That organization became 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 students access, afford, and earn postsecondary credentials.** How we do the work is just as important as what we do. Achieve Atlanta believes that to solve the complex problem of low-degree attainment, we must work across organizations and sectors. Therefore, Achieve Atlanta catalyzes and facilitates 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.

Where We Are Today

Over the past five years, we have seen what a community of stakeholders can accomplish, and we are proud of the impact we've had for students. But as we celebrate our five-year anniversary, ***we find ourselves in a new world.*** As a result of the global pandemic of 2020, Achieve Atlanta has shifted the way we serve students to meet their most critical needs and help keep their postsecondary dreams alive. Although we can't celebrate the way we intended to, we do celebrate this milestone for Achieve Atlanta and the students we serve.

Throughout this report, we share where we are, what we've learned along the way, and where we're going. Most importantly, we share the voices of our Scholars who inspire us every day.

Believe. Expect. Achieve.

1 Krause, Eleanor and Reeves, Richard V. "Raj Chetty in 14 charts: Big findings on opportunity and mobility we should all know." Brookings Institution. January 11, 2018.

2 Winters, John V. "What You Make Depends on Where You Live: College Earnings Across States and Metropolitan Areas." Thomas B. Fordham Institute. May 2020.

3 Complete College Georgia. Accessed August 12, 2020.



Taniya Shockley
University of West Georgia, Class of 2020

REFLECTING ON THE PAST

5 Years



2016: Partner with Edu-Tech and Beyond 12 to provide coaching and advising to Achieve Atlanta Scholars enrolled in college

Edu-Tech Enterprises works to build capacity with Scholars at postsecondary institutions in Georgia by providing the academic, social, and emotional support needed to succeed in higher education through a personalized student coaching service.

Beyond 12 uses a technology platform and their coaches to provide students with the academic, social, and emotional support they need to succeed in higher education and in life.

Launch Summer College Connect, a tech-enabled summer melt initiative

Implement FAFSA clinic model to assist families in completing the FAFSA

Create College Ambassador Program

Launch Achieve Atlanta Scholarship

Launch the college success model; partner with five Georgia higher education institutions: (Atlanta Metropolitan State College; Atlanta Technical College; Georgia State University; Oglethorpe University; Spelman College) to support Achieve Atlanta Scholars enrolled at each school



Achieve Atlanta launches with \$20 million grant from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation

Tina Fernandez hired as founding Executive Director / CEO

Achieve Atlanta and Atlanta Public Schools form partnership to provide high school students with quality college advising

Inaugural Board of Directors forms and Bill Rogers elected Chair of the Board

2015: Partner with College Advising Corps (CAC) to provide in-school, near-peer college advising to all seniors

The College Advising Corps works to increase the number of low-income, first-generation college, and underrepresented high school students who enter and complete higher education. They do this through two innovative program models, an in-school model and a virtual model.

2015

2016

2017: OneGoal program begins serving APS juniors in targeted high schools through credit-bearing college knowledge and skills course

OneGoal is the nation's only teacher-led college access and success organization. They work to ensure underserved high school students go to and graduate from college.

2019: Expand College Ambassador Program to 10 partner schools

In 2016, Achieve Atlanta launched the college ambassador program at 5 postsecondary partner institutions to provide a peer support network and better engage Scholars. Ambassadors provide guidance to other Scholars and help build connections among each cohort of Scholars at their respective campuses through group communication and Scholar gatherings.

2017

Clayton State University, Kennesaw State University, and Savannah State University become Achieve Atlanta College Success partners

2018

Georgia Institute of Technology and University of West Georgia become Achieve Atlanta College Success partners

Pilot Completion Grant Program for Scholars in need of funding to finish 2-year degree within one additional term

2019

Albany State University joins College Success partnership

Claire "Yum" Arnold elected Achieve Atlanta Board Chair

2020

Pilot Emergency Grant Program with Scholarship America

Launch Match & Fit List Builder

Achieve Atlanta Scholars start to graduate!

Provide Student Assistance Program to support Scholar behavioral health

2018: Begin to offer free SAT School Day to all APS juniors

Achieve Atlanta worked with APS and the College Board to implement SAT School Day, whereby every junior in the district takes the SAT during the spring semester, at school, for free. This strategy has dramatically increased the number of APS students taking a college entrance exam—the most recent data show that 90% of 2019 Atlanta Public Schools graduates took the SAT, compared to 57% of the graduating class prior to SAT School Day.

2020: COVID-19

When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in the United States, we took action to support Scholars:

- ▲ Grew emergency grants program to assist more Scholars financially impacted by COVID-19
- ▲ Hosted a food distribution for Scholars, in partnership with the Atlanta Community Food Bank
- ▲ Launched Scholar Well-Being Survey and follow up program



CELEBRATING OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

A young woman with glasses and a joyful expression is shown from the chest up, wearing a black graduation gown. She is throwing her black graduation cap into the air with her right hand, and her left hand is raised in a celebratory gesture. The cap is suspended in the air above her head, with its tassel visible. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a body of water.

Harnessing the power of collaboration, Achieve Atlanta, Atlanta Public Schools, colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations, students, and families have worked together to make **strong, consistent progress** over the past five years.

Jasmine Maddox
Albion College, Class of 2020

SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT



Kynaston DeGrasse **Sophomore at University of Missouri** **KIPP Atlanta Collegiate, 2019 Cohort**

As one of six children, Kynaston DeGrasse always knew she wanted to study a STEM field in college, but she was not sure how she would pay for her education. Attending an Achieve Atlanta FAFSA workshop during senior year helped her realize that college could be affordable.

With newfound freedom, Kynaston applied to more than 10 colleges with a focus on those with high graduation rates so that she could use the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship. In the end, she chose the University of Missouri, enrolling with 36 credit hours that she earned in high school.

"Achieve Atlanta has pushed me to realize that everything is a blessing and to go after all of the opportunities college offers me. I've been successful in college and will continue to be successful because I now understand what it means to work hard to achieve such a big goal. I can't wait to support future Achieve Atlanta Scholars in the same way." — **Kynaston DeGrasse**

One year later, Kynaston is now a health science major with a pre-medicine focus, double minoring in psychology and human development. During her first year, she interned at a local women and children's hospital where she shadowed doctors and nurses. Once Kynaston graduates, she plans to attend medical school and residency, eventually opening her own OB-GYN practice in Atlanta.



College Access

Since our founding, we have partnered with APS and nonprofits to provide high school students hands-on assistance to complete the necessary steps to enroll in college, including identifying their best college options, completing applications, understanding and applying for financial aid, and starting the transition from high school to college.

Match & Fit List Builder

In 2020, Achieve Atlanta and Atlanta Public Schools launched the [Match & Fit List Builder](#), an online platform to serve as a starting place for APS students' college search. The List Builder uses APS-specific academic and college admissions data to help students build a list of postsecondary options that best match their academic qualifications and fit their personal, social, and financial needs. In the spring 2020 term, **more than 1,000 APS students utilized the tool** despite being virtual for most of the term.



College Access Working Group and College Access Teams

Achieve Atlanta created the College Access Working Group (CAWG) in 2015 to guide the college access efforts across APS. CAWG includes representatives from Achieve Atlanta, Atlanta Public Schools, College Advising Corps (CAC), and OneGoal. The group has met regularly over the last five years and collaborates on college advising strategies and interventions, data tracking, and professional development.

Achieve Atlanta also helps coordinate high school College Access Teams (CAT)—the school staff members involved in college access work in each APS high school and their nonprofit college advising partners.

What We're Learning

High schools cannot do this alone; external organizations add needed capacity and specialization on college access

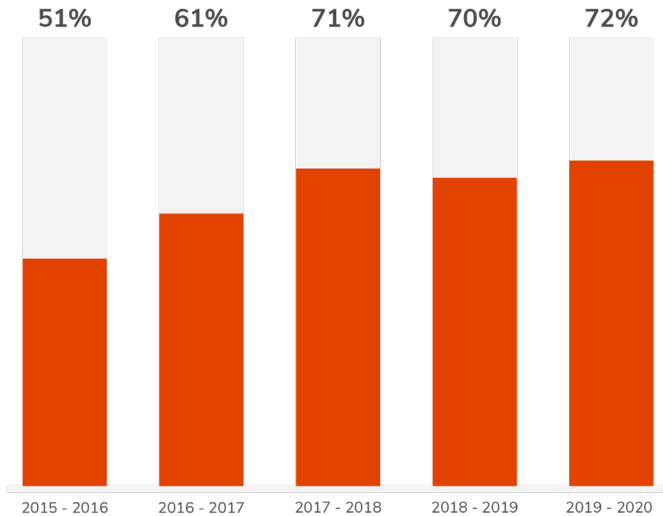
High schools are held accountable for testing and graduation rates – not for job placement and college completion. According to the American School Counselor Association, the counselor to student ratio in Georgia is 466:1. With these ratios, it is unrealistic to expect our students will receive the high-touch support needed to make it to and through college by our counselors and high schools alone. We've seen how external organizations, working in close partnership with schools and districts, can provide not only the additional advising capacity but also specialized expertise. The path to college is not straightforward, and best practices in college advising continue to evolve, especially after the onset of COVID-19. Organizations like Achieve Atlanta, CAC and OneGoal can play a crucial partnership role and stay abreast of an evolving postsecondary landscape.

Providing the SAT during the school day in APS has been a game changer for starting the college conversation earlier

Sixteen states, including South Carolina and Tennessee, fund SAT during the school day for public schools and a number of others provide a similar program for the ACT. By providing this for juniors in APS, Achieve Atlanta enables students start the college-going process much earlier, have a better idea of their college-going possibilities, and gain eligibility for certain scholarships and aid. Because of COVID-19, many colleges are going "test-optional" and will not require college entrance exam scores for Fall 2021 admissions. Therefore, we will continue to evolve practices so that students can have good options when applying to college.

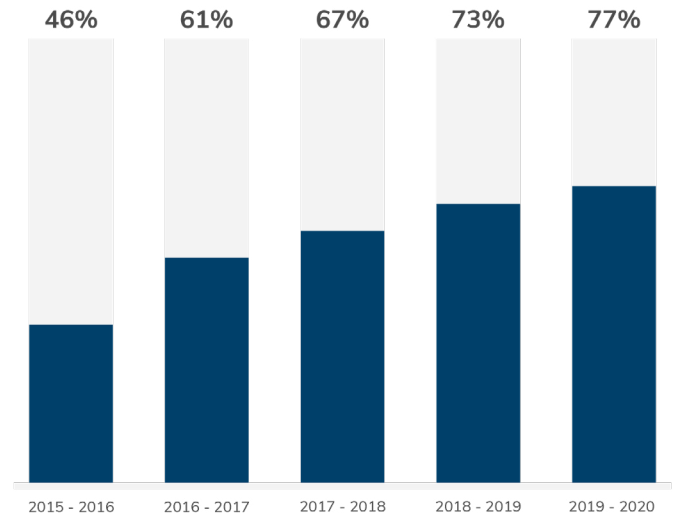
Postsecondary Access Outcomes

Seniors completing the FAFSA



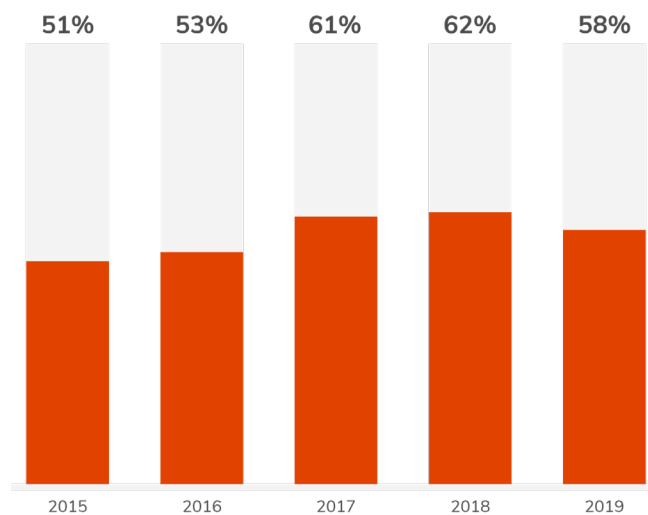
Since 2015-2016, FAFSA completion has increased 20 percentage points to 72%.

Seniors submitting 3+ college applications



In our first year, less than half of APS seniors applied to 3+ colleges. Now, last year, 77% did.

District-wide seamless enrollment in college



The percentage of graduates enrolling seamlessly, meaning the fall immediately after graduating, has increased from 51% to 58%, representing an increase of nearly 400 students.



1,000+

Atlanta Public Schools juniors have used the Match & Fit List Builder in their college search process.

*In 2017-2018, the Federal Student Aid data for FAFSA increased the age included in the data from 18 to 19. Some of the increase from 61 to 71% is due to this change.

Affordability



Achieve Atlanta Scholarship

The Achieve Atlanta Scholarship launched in 2016 serving a cohort of nearly 600 Scholars. **Now, Achieve Atlanta serves more than 3,000 Scholars at more than 240 higher education institutions across the country.**

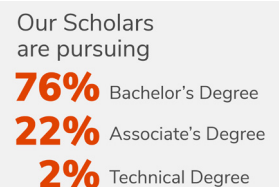
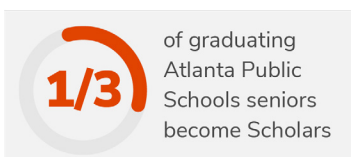
The Scholarship is a need-based award designed to support APS students pursuing various postsecondary education paths after high school. For students eligible for the four-year college scholarship, Achieve Atlanta awards \$5,000 per year (renewable for up to four years of school). The two-year or technical college scholarship award is \$1,500 per year (renewable for up to two years of school), and students can transition to the four-year scholarship upon completion of their degree. When combined with other sources of financial aid, the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship reduces students' and families' need to take out high-interest, private loans.

The Achieve Atlanta Scholarship is an important part of Achieve Atlanta's broader effort to dramatically increase the number of APS students who earn a postsecondary degree or credential.

"Achieve Atlanta's mission means a lot to me. I'll be a first generation college student and getting this scholarship lets me know that I am ready for college."

— **Destiny Crawford, Mays High School, Class of 2020**

Achieve Atlanta Scholars



Emergency Grants Program

Many Achieve Atlanta Scholars face unexpected transportation, housing and health needs that negatively affect their ability to stay in school. To address this, Achieve Atlanta partnered with Scholarship America to develop a pilot emergency grant program with a subset of Scholars who could receive grants of up to \$500. Launched in January 2020, the program awarded more than \$10,000 in emergency grants prior to COVID-19.

When COVID-19 struck and campuses closed across the country, students were forced back home, and many lost their jobs. Achieve Atlanta immediately responded by making emergency funds available to all Scholars enrolled in spring 2020 and securing additional funding to provide more grants.

The grants helped students facing financial emergencies related to moving off campus and finding alternative housing, traveling home, paying for medical expenses, and securing technology (such as a laptop or Wi-Fi access) to transition to online coursework. Between March 15 and June 30, 2020, nearly a third of eligible Scholars applied for an emergency grant. Achieve Atlanta awarded nearly \$190,000, allowing students to focus less on finances and more on the changing demands of remote learning.

"I would just like to thank you guys A LOT! Not only for what you guys have blessed me with but what you have blessed a lot of other Scholars with as well. This pandemic was definitely unexpected and left a lot of people without...or trying to make something happen with so little. But you guys have provided a way for students!! I can now sign up for my summer classes as well as finish my spring classes and finals thanks to you guys!!"

— Emergency Grant Recipient

ALMOST

\$190,000

in Emergency Grants awarded to
450+ Scholars in 2019-2020



What We're Learning

Need-based aid is critical, and so are additional supports to increase persistence and completion

Students need help paying for college and during the 2018 legislative session, HB 787 was passed and provided for "a needs based financial aid program to provide grants to eligible students for postsecondary education at institutions of the University System of Georgia." Unfortunately, the program has not been funded and with current state budget cuts due to COVID19, we are not hopeful that it will be in the near future. Still, we strongly believe that once college becomes affordable, communities can dedicate resources to providing the additional wraparound supports that lead to degree completion and ultimately strengthen our city and state.

Making college affordability decisions is incredibly challenging

Even with additional financial aid from our Scholarship and supports like emergency grants, determining whether a college is affordable and making smart decisions on budgeting throughout one's college experience are anything but straightforward. We see this with our students as they try to make sense of how much they will actually pay given the lack of a clear process to get to the bottom line and the confusing award letters they are provided. ([A recent report looked at financial aid award letters from 500 colleges and found there were 136 different terms for the same federal loan. And more than one-third did not include the total costs on the letter!](#)).⁴ They also struggle to meet the documentation requirements to clear FAFSA verification as they seek to clear verification and other financial aid processes at their institutions. We are working internally and with partners to provide transparent, clear information so families can truly understand their college costs.

⁴ Decoding the Cost of College: The Case for Transparent Financial Aid Award Letters." uAspire & New America. June 2018.

College Success

As we work toward our goal of increasing the number of APS students graduating from college, we have partnered with postsecondary institutions and college success experts to offer direct support and advising services to our Scholars.

Partnerships

Achieve Atlanta's College Success Team has spent the past five years creating and building partnerships with higher education institutions and nonprofit organizations. In 2015, this work was launched with five postsecondary and two nonprofit partners. Today, these collaborative relationships have expanded to include 11 higher education institutions and three nonprofit organizations. These partners work with Achieve Atlanta to determine persistence milestones, identify strengths and gaps in services, and address the social-emotional, academic, and tactical barriers to college completion.



Persistence Programming and Support

Each year the College Success Team has hosted several signature convenings created to inform programming and practices that support successful Scholar persistence and completion. These include Ambassador and Scholar roundtables, which function as peer focus groups, as well as Partner Learning Forums where college advisers and administrators discuss common barriers and ideate on solutions. While the College Success Team primarily supports Scholars in college, they also engage with graduating seniors to support their transition to college. Scholar Nights are an opportunity for incoming freshmen to learn about the expectations for being a Scholar and meet their community of support. Ambassadors also conduct outreach to develop a relationship with and help students navigate potential barriers. Campus Mixers offer new and returning Scholars a chance to get to know one another and prepare for the upcoming academic school year.

Supporting Scholars through COVID-19

COVID-19 not only affected Scholars' academic experience but also shifted many of their everyday lives. In addition to emergency grants, Achieve Atlanta partnered with the Atlanta Community Food Bank to host a food distribution day where more than 600 Scholars and their family members received groceries. Achieve Atlanta also surveyed Scholars on their well-being and current needs. We strategically followed up to understand their concerns and connect them with resources.

One theme that emerged from the survey and conversations with Scholars is concern for their mental health as they balance college and many other responsibilities. To address this, in spring 2020, Achieve Atlanta launched a Student Assistance Program to connect Scholars and their immediate family members with professional counselors at no cost.

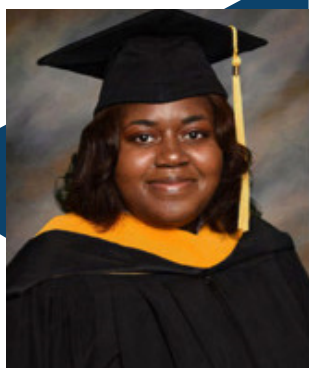
What We're Learning

Persistence is a harder "needle" to move than access

Student success is a product of a complex variety of inputs from a number of sources. While our scholarship provides much needed financial assistance, and the outreach, coaching and support offered through our partnerships are valuable, students continue to face a combination of barriers that inhibit persistence and completion. To combat the effects of these other variables, we champion efforts to strengthen colleges and universities to better support students - especially first generation and low-income students.

Essential elements for Scholars' success include proactive advising, intrusive support and access to holistic support services

Each year we grow our partnerships and enrich our programming so that these essential Scholar needs are met. However, colleges and universities must continue to redesign their student support services to provide these resources at scale. Therefore, we embrace evidence-based practices like the University System of Georgia's Momentum Year and the CUNY ASAP Model and advocate for the implementation of these strategies at all colleges and universities.



"I worked hard to make my mother and grandmother proud. I did that. I worked hard to get knowledge and to make a way for kids that look like me. I did that."

— Bianca Smith, Xavier University, Class of 2020

Postsecondary Success Outcomes



11

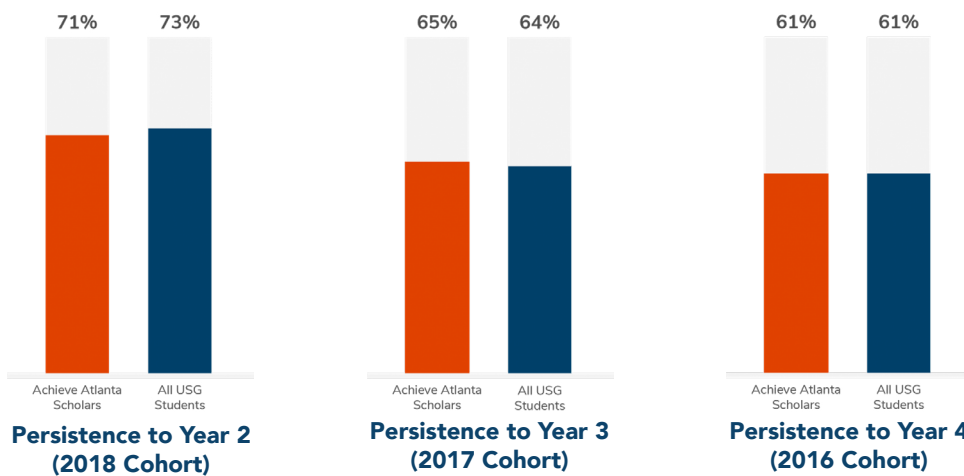
Postsecondary
Institution Partners



3

Nonprofit
Partners

As of fall 2019, Scholars enrolled in the University System of Georgia (USG) persisted at similar rates to all USG students, regardless of income status.



*73% of Scholars attend USG institutions. USG persistence as of fall 2019 term for full-time, first-time students either retained or graduated in any USG institution. Rates by institution were weighted by the proportion of Achieve Atlanta Scholars attending each institution to calculate overall rate. Comparisons by socioeconomic status not publicly available. Source: USG By the Numbers Retention Report, System-Wide Retention accessed August 2020.

2020 Achieve Atlanta Graduates

While we are celebrating five years of our organization's existence, we are also celebrating our first cohort of 4-year graduates! Our Achieve Atlanta Graduates have earned their postsecondary credentials during a very uncertain time but have found some stability in knowing they are prepared for their future careers and social mobility goals.

Achieve Atlanta Graduate Spotlight



Deronshay Gay

University of Georgia, Class of 2020

Frederick Douglass High School, 2016 Cohort

As an APS student, Deronshay Gay worked with her college advisers and counselors to understand which colleges she should apply to attend. She decided to apply to the University of Georgia (UGA), a reach school for her, after meeting several UGA graduates who had positive experiences. Deronshay always wanted to go to college, but was not exposed to many resources about financial aid until her senior year when the College Advising Corps (CAC) program was implemented at her high school.

Deronshay's college advisers helped her with application essays, encouraged her to remain positive during the process, and connected her with college resources. It was also during her senior year that she heard how Achieve Atlanta was launching a need-based scholarship for APS graduates. In 2016, Deronshay was accepted to UGA and was also a part of the first cohort of Achieve Atlanta Scholars.

"College allowed me to find my voice and discover what I'm passionate about. I learned that I love counseling people and helping people to reach their goals and dreams. That's why I'm so excited to become a college adviser with CAC for the next two years. This is really a dream come true because my college advisers had such a strong impact on me applying to college and succeeding in college, and now I get to do that for other APS students."

While at UGA, Deronshay majored in psychology and minored in communication studies. Achieve Atlanta College Success Partner, Edu-Tech Enterprises, is one of the reasons Deronshay says she was successful.

Deronshay earned her degree this year and looks forward to serving APS students as a CAC adviser, working with some of the same APS staff members and Achieve Atlanta partners who supported her in achieving her dreams for college success.



Ijeoma Orianwo

Kennesaw State University, Class of 2020

Major: Psychology

APS High School: Benjamin E. Mays High School

Next Steps: Earning her master's degree

"I have accomplished more than I planned to. I held a job throughout college, continued to keep my grades up, gained friends, helped start two organizations, networked, and interned to gain years of experience in my future career. I've gotten to know and love the person I am!"



Augustine Jimenez

Boston University, Class of 2020

Major: Social Sciences

APS High School: North Atlanta High School

Next Steps: Serving in the Peace Corps

"My abuelita and ama gave their all to afford me this moment, and nothing would be possible without them. I can finally confirm that this first-generation, low-income, APS-educated Mexican-American has accomplished that dream that they so selflessly dreamed."



Edward Lee

Atlanta Technical College, Class of 2020

Certificates in Commercial Wiring and Residential Wiring

APS High School: Booker T. Washington High School

Next Steps: Getting his CDL license and working for a major company

"The best thing about my education experience was being an Achieve Atlanta Scholar. Achieve Atlanta helped me with everything I needed to succeed. . . classes, books, and tutoring services."

"Me being the best version of me really fits in with Achieve Atlanta's mission for all students."

— **Dayla Jackson**, Oglethorpe University, Class of 2020



Ebony James

University of West Georgia, Class of 2020

Major: Elementary Education

APS High School: Grady High School

Next Steps: Teaching 3rd grade

"These past four years have not been easy, but all of those bumps in the road helped me to make it where I am today. My parents never went to college and it is an honor that I was afforded the opportunity to go to college and graduate within four years."



LTL (Lanarion) Norwood

Morehouse College, Class of 2020

Major: Political Science

APS High School: The B.E.S.T. Academy

Next Steps: Earning his MBA

"I'm the first person in my household to graduate traditionally from high school, and I knew I had to at least get a four-year degree. When it comes to being a first-generation college student it's like climbing a ladder that nobody else in your family has climbed before."

"The path I chose in regards to my area of study was an easy decision for me. Being a selfless person, I wanted to pursue something that was much bigger than myself. I believe we all were put on this earth to serve one another in some type of fashion. As this chapter ends, another begins. I'm looking forward to what the future holds for me."

— **Eugene Mustipher**, Georgia State University, Class of 2020



"Thank you for pushing me through. With my degree, I can enter the medical field and work my way to the top. Please continue to support Scholars."

— **Nikeea Simmons**, Atlanta Metropolitan State College, Class of 2020



Keishunna Hardeman
Georgia State University, Class of 2020

COLLABORATING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Because we know students—especially those who are first in their families to attend college—may face barriers completing postsecondary education, we have spent the last five years mobilizing a community of organizations to support students in a holistic way.

College Access Partners



ATLANTA
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS



Affordability Partners



College Success Partners



Achieve Atlanta Staff



Tina Fernandez
Executive Director



Susanne Diggs-Wilborn
Vice President,
College Success



Sam Rauschenberg
Vice President,
Data Strategy



Korynn Schooley
Vice President,
College Access



Ninfa Murillo
Director, Scholarship &
Financial Wellness



William Tran
Director, Operations &
Information Systems



Vett Vandiver
Director, Marketing &
Communications



Sweta Vivek
Director, Data,
Analytics & Insights



Anona Walker
Director, Postsecondary
Partnerships



Laura Gangelhoff
Manager,
Operations & Systems



Bria Price
Manager,
College Success Program



Jordan Tafari
Manager,
Scholar Support



Jennifer Pitre
Executive Assistant

Board of Directors

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

Joe Arnold, Senior Vice President and Group Leader, Truist Financial Corp.

Mark Becker, President, Georgia State University

Ernest Greer, Co-President, Greenberg Traurig

Beverly Tatum, President Emerita, Spelman College

Kathy Waller, Retired from The Coca-Cola Company

Our Funders

**JOSEPH B. WHITEHEAD
FOUNDATION**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Kaiser Permanente
The Lumina Foundation
SunTrust Foundation
The Zeist Foundation



Maleni Palacios
Barnard College, Columbia University,
Class of 2020

Looking Ahead

The 2020-2021 academic year will be different than any we've ever experienced. APS high schools will be entirely online for much of the fall semester, as will some colleges. Other higher education institutions plan to offer in-person instruction and still others a hybrid model. While much remains unknown, it is certain that our Scholars will need more support than ever to navigate a new way of learning and studying during this ongoing educational disruption.

At Achieve Atlanta, we must also find new ways of working. But despite changing the way we work, our WHY remains the same. We still envision a city **where race and income no longer predict postsecondary success and upward mobility**. But we also know that our work just got a whole lot harder to do. The pandemic has pulled back the curtain on inequities and as usual, Black and Brown students, as well as students from low-income communities, will be hardest hit. As a result, we've talked a lot internally about our **champion for students** core value—our commitment to never give up on students and do whatever it takes to remove the barriers they face.

The pandemic has also shown us how much we need each other. And so now, more than ever, we are leaning into our value of **intentional collaboration**. We know that to solve the complex problem of low-degree attainment, we must work in community and across organizations and sectors.

And finally, we must continue to set high standards, for ourselves, our partners and our students. Incremental progress will not be enough. To accomplish great things, we must have **bold expectations**. They will shape how we execute every day.

A few weeks ago, we lost our beloved statesman, hero, and neighbor Congressman John Lewis. As we continue to mourn his loss and celebrate his legacy, we are reminded of his words:

"Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime."

We are honored to be in the struggle with all of you to ensure that our young people can achieve their dreams. Thank you, and **here's to the next five years**.





Mary Hinton

University of Alabama, Class of 2020

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