



2025 Impact Report

Powering Possibilities



LETTER FROM CHERYL

Dear Achieve Atlanta Community,

Ten years ago, Achieve Atlanta was born from a bold vision: to dramatically increase college access and success for Atlanta Public Schools students. Today, we stand alongside almost 2,000 Achieve Atlanta alumni and thousands more Scholars who are pursuing their dreams with courage and determination. As Maya Angelou wrote in her poem *On the Pulse of Morning*: “Lift up your hearts. Each new hour holds new chances for a new beginning.” This milestone is not just a celebration of our past, it’s a launchpad for our future.

This year marked the first year of our 2024–27 Strategic Plan, and we remain steadfast in our mission. We’re proud of our ambitious goals: getting more students into college and ensuring more of them graduate. Our programming continues to receive favorable external evaluations, affirming our approach. At the same time, we’re leaning into innovation to address the real barriers our Scholars face. One example is our new Back on Track program, designed to support Scholars who’ve encountered challenges and need a boost to continue their journey. We’re also expanding our amazing team to meet the moment, welcoming new hires who bring fresh energy and expertise to help us deepen our impact. I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our board, especially Claire “Yum” Arnold, who concluded her term as chair with grace and generosity. To our Scholars, partners, and supporters: Thank you for believing in what’s possible.

This work is deeply personal to me. This spring, my daughter graduated from Howard University and chose to spend a year of service with AmeriCorps and Hands on Atlanta, preparing for a career in social work. My youngest son is now a college sophomore, navigating the financial, social, and academic challenges that so many of our Scholars face. And my oldest son, who graduated from college in 2023, is courageously navigating his first job out of college in a rapidly changing job market.

My children's journeys mirror those of our Scholars, full of hope, grit, and the pursuit of purpose. These experiences fuel my commitment to our mission and remind me daily why our work matters. Our Scholars are brilliant and resilient, but they need champions to help remove roadblocks so they can soar to their fullest potential.

We are proud of our increased and integrated partnerships. Together, we’re assessing college access and upward mobility across Metro Atlanta and driving collective action. We’re thrilled to expand the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship into Fulton County Schools, starting with Tri-Cities High School and Creekside High School. These partnerships are helping us reach more students and hold each other accountable for real results.

As one Scholar shared, “Being a member of the Achieve Atlanta community means a lot to me. It’s empowering to know I’m backed by a group that believes in my potential and wants to see me succeed.” Achieve Atlanta family, let’s continue to embrace this year’s theme of powering possibilities—for our Scholars and for Atlanta’s high school students, who will know that their dreams of postsecondary success and upward mobility can be a reality.



With gratitude and hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cheryl Watson-Harris".

Cheryl Watson-Harris, Ed.D.
President/Executive Director, Achieve Atlanta

ABOUT ACHIEVE ATLANTA

OUR VISION

Atlanta is a city where race and income no longer predict postsecondary success and upward mobility.

OUR MISSION

To help Atlanta Public Schools students access, afford, and earn a postsecondary credential.

OUR CORE VALUES

UNWAVERING BELIEF

A steadfast confidence in our students is the inspiration and fuel for everything we do. Their dreams are the foundation for our work.

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 Public Schools (APS) students entering ninth grade was projected to earn a postsecondary degree 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.

ABOUT THE ACHIEVE ATLANTA SCHOLARSHIP

Students who complete their final two years of high school within Atlanta Public Schools, maintain a minimum GPA of 75, and meet income requirements are eligible for the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship. Eligible recipients may receive \$5,000 annually for up to four years toward a bachelor's degree, or \$1,500 annually for up to two years for associate or technical programs. Continued eligibility requires college full-time enrollment and a minimum GPA of 2.0.

Case Study Release

September 2024

In partnership with Columbia University's Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL), [Pathways to Partnership: How Cross-Sector Collaboration Can Increase Impact](#) explores our strategic approach to partnership-building, emphasizing how mission alignment, shared values, and a commitment to transparency have enabled us to drive meaningful outcomes for Atlanta Public Schools students. The study not only affirms the effectiveness of our collaborative approach but also provides a road map for expanding our efforts—particularly in integrating career readiness and financial sustainability throughout the Scholar journey.



New Research Brief

October 2024

Conducted by Georgia Policy Labs (GPL), [Stability & Security: How Achieve Atlanta Improves Scholars' Financial Well-Being and Academic Performance](#) highlights the positive impact of Achieve Atlanta's scholarship and support services on student outcomes. This independent analysis found that Achieve Atlanta Scholars are less likely to take out student loans—and when they do, they borrow smaller amounts—leading to improved academic progress and financial and mental well-being.



Community Conversation

November 2024

We hosted our Fall 2024 Community Conversation at Atlanta Technical College, connecting Scholars, alumni, partners, and community leaders for a meaningful morning of engagement and shared learning.



Homecoming

December 2024

Achieve Atlanta's 2024 Homecoming event brought together Scholars and alumni for an evening of connection and celebration at Skyline Park atop Ponce City Market. Participants enjoyed food, games, music, and giveaways while fostering meaningful networking in a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere.

2024-25 HIGHLIGHTS



Policy & Advocacy Efforts

January 2025

In an effort to tackle systemic barriers our students face and scale our impact beyond Atlanta, Achieve Atlanta launched its policy and advocacy work. During the legislative session, we shared the impact of need-based funding and completion grants with our state legislators. At the federal level, we advocated to maintain the Federal Pell Grant program, which is critical to making college affordable for 96% of our Scholars and students like them across the state and country.

Continuing the Conversation Learning Series With TNTP

March 2025

In partnership with [TNTP](#), Achieve Atlanta hosted an evening learning series that brought together community stakeholders to examine the barriers to economic and social mobility in Atlanta. Through guided reflection, shared learning, and collaborative problem-solving, participants connected their lived experiences to broader structural challenges and explored actionable solutions to drive change.



Scholar Night/Pre-Scholar Events

April 2025-June 2025

Each year, Scholar Night celebrates scholarship applicants while providing key program information and opportunities to engage with our college and nonprofit partners. Nearly 1,000 students and families participated in the festive “Achieve Atlanta Land,” fostering meaningful connections and commemorating students’ high school journeys. Beyond Scholar Night, we hosted a series of virtual Scholarship Onboarding Sessions, offering opportunities for personalized guidance through the college enrollment process.



Brand Refresh

May 2025

Achieve Atlanta unveiled a refreshed brand identity that reflects our continued growth, core values, and bold vision for the future. This update included a redesigned logo, color palette, website, and visual framework that better communicate the organization’s mission and impact—while also simplifying how we share our story, services, and the Scholar Journey toward upward mobility.



Board Leadership Change

June 2025

Dr. Gregory Vaughn was voted board chair of Achieve Atlanta, succeeding Claire “Yum” Arnold’s impactful tenure in the role. A long-standing board member and partner at Spencer Stuart, Dr. Vaughn brings over 30 years of leadership experience and a deep commitment to advancing student success.



6,767

Achieve Atlanta Scholars
since our founding in 2015



Scholars have attended

409

different postsecondary
institutions across the country



\$70K+

in emergency grant funding awarded to
Scholars facing financial emergencies

For the class of 2024

58%



of APS graduates enrolled in
postsecondary education in the
fall after high school graduation



80%

of APS seniors completed three
or more college applications

ACHIEVE ATLANTA: BY THE NUMBERS



94%

of Scholars are Black or Latinx



30%

are first-generation college students

96%

are eligible for
Pell Grants



1/3

of graduating Atlanta
Public Schools seniors
become Scholars

More than

**\$65
million**



in scholarship funds
(provided through spring 2025)

833

Scholars are in the
fall 2024 Cohort



72%

of APS seniors completed the FAFSA



Since our first cohort entered
college nine years ago,

1,942

Scholars have earned a degree or
credential as of August 2025



Our Scholars have pursued:

83% bachelor's degree

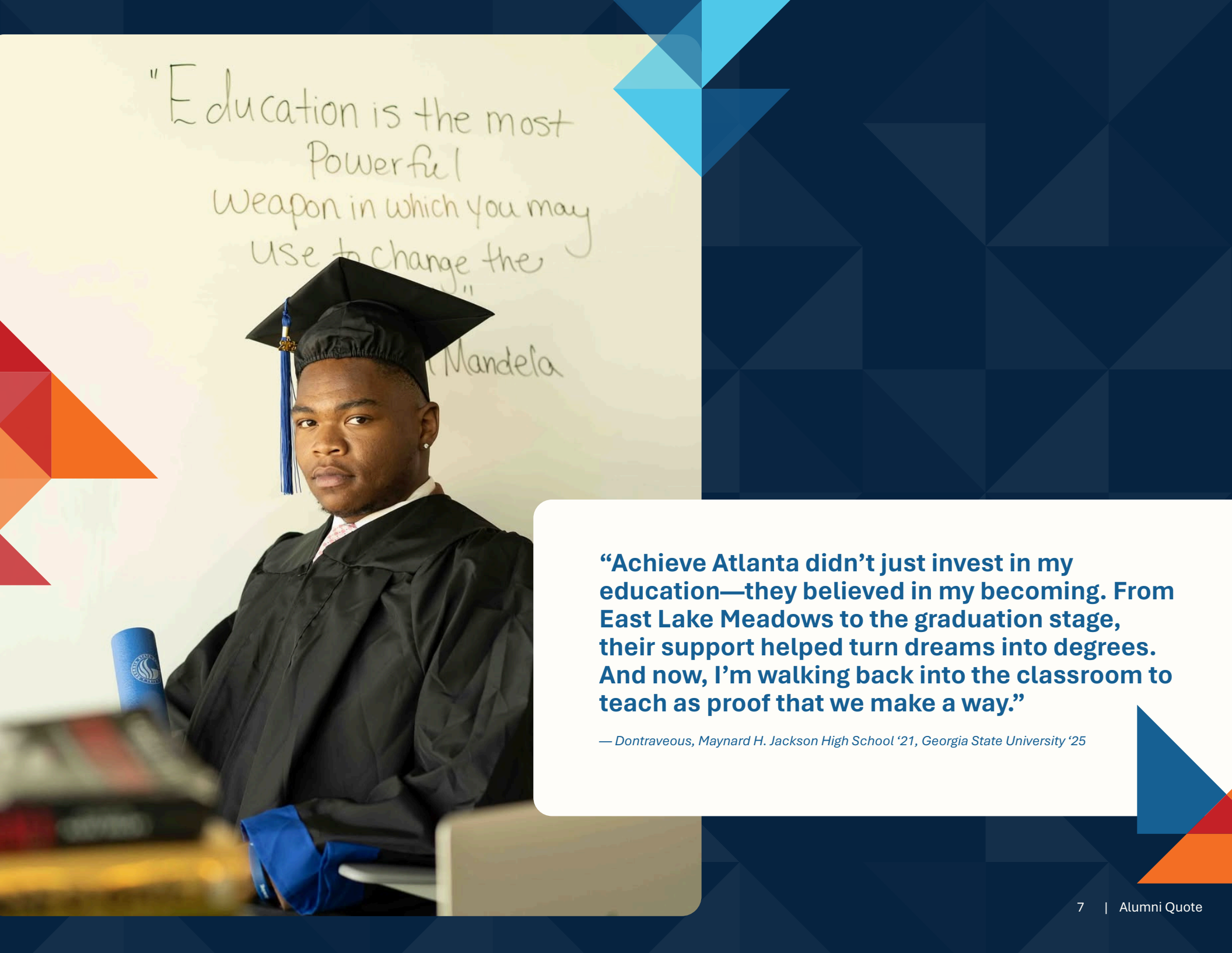
15% associate degree

2% technical degree/certificate

\$288K+



in completion grant funding awarded to
Scholars within two terms of earning
their degree, who have exhausted their
Scholarship funds



"Education is the most
Powerful
Weapon in which you may
use to change the
world."
— Nelson Mandela

“Achieve Atlanta didn’t just invest in my education—they believed in my becoming. From East Lake Meadows to the graduation stage, their support helped turn dreams into degrees. And now, I’m walking back into the classroom to teach as proof that we make a way.”

— Dontraveous, Maynard H. Jackson High School ‘21, Georgia State University ‘25

ACHIEVE ATLANTA ALUMNI PROFILES



Britany

Berry College, Class of 2025

Major: Spanish and Psychology; Minor: Women and Gender Studies

APS High School: Maynard H. Jackson High School

Next steps: Attending law school and becoming an immigration lawyer

“Achieve Atlanta didn’t just support me financially; it helped me transition into college life with confidence. As a first-gen student and daughter of immigrant parents, I often felt like I was navigating everything on my own. This program gave me the guidance, resources, and sense of belonging I needed to succeed. I’m incredibly grateful to be part of such a supportive community!”



Denisse

Whittier College, Class of 2025

Major: Social Work; Minor: Economics

APS High School: North Atlanta High School

Next steps: Earning a master's degree at the University of Georgia

“Achieve Atlanta gave me the financial support I needed to focus on my goals without the constant weight of financial stress. This allowed me to engage in my education and become deeply involved on campus!”



Carlous

Savannah State University, Class of 2025

Major: Visual and Performing Arts

APS High School: South Atlanta High School

Next steps: Pursuing a career in the entertainment industry

“Achieve Atlanta believed in me from day one. Their support gave me the space to dream bigger and the resources to make those dreams real.”



Ilyana

Clayton State University, Class of 2024

Major: Interdisciplinary Studies; Focus: Elementary Education

APS High School: Maynard H. Jackson High School

Next steps: Attending graduate school to earn a MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching) and teaching kindergarten

“Achieve Atlanta has been incredibly supportive throughout my journey, both financially and with additional guidance. A huge shoutout to Dr. Charles and Dr. Sheila Barker (Edu-Tech)—they’ve been there for me since my freshman year, offering consistent support and encouragement. Achieve Atlanta has truly played a vital role in helping me reach this point in my educational career.”

ACHIEVE ATLANTA ALUMNI PROFILES



Jonathan

Clark Atlanta University, Class of 2025

Major: History

APS High School: Daniel McLaughlin
Therrell High School

Next steps: Participating in KIPP Atlanta
Schools' teaching residency program

"Achieve Atlanta has helped me with financial stability and community support during matriculation; I can't thank them enough for that!"



Lauren

Georgia Tech, Class of 2024

Major: Psychology

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

Next steps: Earning a master's degree in
public health

"One of the greatest benefits of being an Achieve Atlanta Scholar and Ambassador was being able to connect with and mentor fellow Atlanta Public Schools grads as we navigated attending Georgia Tech. It was a very different environment than we were used to, so it was nice to have someone you could relate with nearby."



Kennedy

Howard University, Class of 2024

Major: Strategic, Legal, and Management
Communications

APS High School: Midtown High School

Next steps: Pursuing an MBA and career
in marketing

"The Achieve Atlanta Scholarship was a strong asset in my college experience. It took some financial pressure off my shoulders and gave me the chance to focus a little more on my education and personal growth. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to take advantage of opportunities that helped me get closer to my goals. I'm super grateful for the support."



Harrison

Georgia State University, Class of 2025

Major: Middle Grades Education

APS High School: Midtown High School

Next steps: Teaching at M.D. Roberts
School of the Arts

"The coaching offered at Achieve Atlanta has helped me create and follow a road map to success for college and my career!"

LOOKING AHEAD

Guided by our new strategic plan, Achieve Atlanta is deepening its commitment to ensuring more Atlanta students earn postsecondary degrees that unlock economic mobility and long-term opportunity. We've sharpened our focus on three key areas, Powering Possibilities, Supporting Success, and Fostering Futures, to align every aspect of our work with the goal of increasing degree attainment. By growing our team, expanding our goals, and strengthening our capacity, we're better positioned to serve Atlanta students and families with greater impact and care, helping Scholars not just access college, but complete it, and thrive beyond.



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.

EXPANDING BEYOND ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Starting in the fall of 2025, students at Creekside and Tri-Cities High Schools in the Fulton County Schools (FCS) district will gain access to Achieve Atlanta's powerful college-going support services. And in February 2026, they'll be eligible to apply for the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship, which offers up to \$20,000 for college tuition and fees.

Advancing the success of students, Scholars, and alumni requires more than dedication—it demands strong, collaborative partnerships rooted in shared values and a commitment to educational equity. Together, we've expanded access to resources, mentorship, and academic support that directly influence student achievement and long-term success.

OUR PARTNERS

We are sincerely grateful for another year of collaboration and advancement, and we look forward to continuing this vital work together.



2024-25 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.

Tim Renick

Executive Director, National Institute for Student Success

Greg Vaughn

Leadership Consultant, Spencer Stuart

Kathy Waller

Executive Director, Atlanta Committee for Progress

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The Spencer Foundation
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