



2026

IMPACT REPORT

LETTER FROM CHERYL

Dear Achieve Atlanta Community,

Ten years ago, Achieve Atlanta was founded on a simple but powerful belief: that Atlanta's students deserve a future defined not by circumstance, but by opportunity. Our founders recognized that too many talented young people were left to navigate the path to college and career on their own. They challenged our city to do better: to invest in students, remove barriers, and create a stronger bridge between potential and possibility. As I reflect on our first decade, I am filled with both gratitude and pride for what we have accomplished together. The story of Achieve Atlanta is about what can be accomplished when a city decides its young people are worth investing in.

We deepened our investment this year by expanding the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship program to two Fulton County Schools. This growth created more opportunities for Atlanta students to access college and benefit from the support we offer through our talented partners. Our partnership with Atlanta Public Schools remains foundational to our success, and we continue to find new ways to strengthen our united commitment to students and their dreams for fulfilling futures. The dedication of our nonprofit and postsecondary partners continues to serve as a beacon for Scholars, as these special organizations welcome them to campus, champion their success, and help create pathways that transform lives.

As we expanded our impact locally, we also worked to advance solutions across the state. Our policy team, alongside our dedicated partners and Scholars, worked tirelessly to advocate for the Georgia DREAMS Scholarship.

DREAMS marks the first statewide need-based aid program in Georgia, a significant milestone for all students. We were honored to have shared testimony and research to inform the Senate Study Committee for Higher Education Affordability's process.

As we celebrate this milestone year, we extend our deepest gratitude to Claire "Yum" Arnold, whose board service has spanned the entirety of Achieve Atlanta's first decade. Yum has helped shape the organization from our inception, leaving a lasting imprint on our Scholars, our community, and our future.

More than ever before, our schools, postsecondary institutions, employers, funders, and civic leaders are aligned around the importance of educational attainment and economic mobility. All of this work pours directly into our dynamic Scholars, who are at the very heart of our purpose and mission. Together, we are creating the conditions necessary to ensure Atlanta is a city where race and income no longer predict postsecondary success and upward mobility.



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

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Gabriela

Eastern Connecticut State University, Class of 2026

Major: Economics

APS High School: North Atlanta High School

Next Steps: Pursuing a master's degree in agricultural and resource economics

"Achieve Atlanta allowed me to focus on enjoying my college experience, really being able to take advantage of everything as a first-generation student. There's not a single thing I regret in all my four years!"

ABOUT ACHIEVE ATLANTA

Achieve Atlanta believes every student **deserves the opportunity** to earn a postsecondary credential and **obtain the full benefits** that higher education provides.



2,425

Scholars have earned a degree or credential over our 10-year history

OUR VISION

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

OUR MISSION

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



Eugene

University of Georgia, Class of 2026

Major: Business Management

APS High School: Maynard Jackson High School

Next Steps: Begin building his career in wealth management with OpenArc Corporate Advisory in Atlanta

"Achieve Atlanta is not only a scholarship program in my eyes, but a family and community that I can lean on as I enter the real world. Over the past four years at the University of Georgia, I've grown in ways I never expected."

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 within six years of high school graduation. The following year, with these findings in mind, the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation provided the financial investment to help create a new organization, Achieve Atlanta, focused on increasing the number of Atlanta students earning a postsecondary credential.



Mahamad

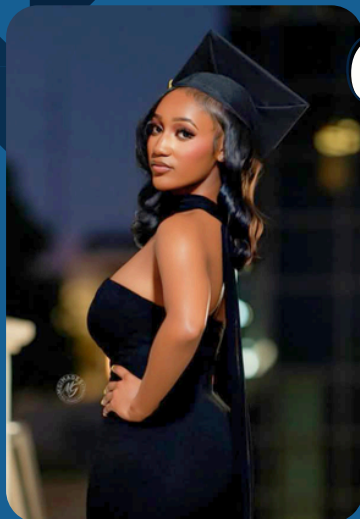
Morehouse College, Class of 2026

Major: Biology

APS High School: Booker T. Washington High School

Next Steps: Attending Tufts University School of Dental Medicine to pursue a Doctor of Dental Medicine degree

“Achieve Atlanta played a pivotal role in my college journey by providing not only financial support, but also the encouragement and resources that allowed me to focus on my education and pursue my dreams with confidence. One of the most impactful parts of my experience was the mentor/mentee program during my first year of college. It gave me a safe space to express myself openly without fear of judgment while navigating the challenges of transitioning into college.”



Christeanna

Alabama State University, Class of 2026

Major: Rehabilitation services

APS High School: South Atlanta High School

Next Steps: Pursuing a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling

“Achieve Atlanta has been a meaningful part of my college journey, and I am incredibly grateful for their investment in my future. In addition to the scholarship support I received, the additional funding provided throughout my time in college made a tremendous difference by helping ease financial stress and allowing me to stay focused on my academics, leadership opportunities, and professional development.”

ABOUT THE ACHIEVE ATLANTA SCHOLARSHIP

The Achieve Atlanta Scholarship is a need-based award designed to support eligible graduates from Atlanta Public Schools and select high schools within Fulton County Schools who are pursuing postsecondary pathways. When combined with other sources of financial aid, the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship helps reduce the financial gap our students face and allows them to focus on their academic progress. The Achieve Atlanta Scholarship is an important part of Achieve Atlanta's broader effort to dramatically increase the number of students who earn a postsecondary degree or credential.

2025–26 HIGHLIGHTS



Expanded Into Fulton County Schools (FCS)

September 2025

Achieve Atlanta introduced our scholarship to Creekside and Tri-Cities high school students, the first expansion beyond APS. FCS and the United Way provided funding for FAFSA financial advisers through the Scholarship Academy to ensure that completing the FAFSA wasn't a barrier to accessing the scholarship. This investment boosted FAFSA completion from 39% to 68%—more than 8 percentage points higher than state and federal averages.



Fulton County Schools Assemblies

November 2025

Achieve Atlanta celebrated the launch of our partnership with Fulton County Schools, as well as the expansion of the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship to that school district, by hosting assembly events at Creekside High School and Tri-Cities High School. Seniors at each school joined Achieve Atlanta to learn about the Scholarship application process, explore opportunities for their future, and share the incredible dreams they have for themselves.



Community Conversation Event

October 2025

11Alive's Cheryl Preheim hosted Achieve Atlanta's annual Community Conversation event, which centered around our theme of Powering Possibilities. This event featured engaging conversations about the future of college access and success, plus exciting news about the expansion of the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship into Tri-Cities and Creekside high schools.



Achieve Atlanta Named APS District Partner of the Year

November 2025

Atlanta Public Schools (APS) named Achieve Atlanta its 2025 District Partner of the Year! This honor powerfully recognizes a partnership that has transformed the lives of thousands of students over the past decade. Achieve Atlanta was celebrated at the 2025 APyeS Awards, where APS Superintendent Dr. Bryan Johnson and APS Board of Education members joined awardees on stage.



First Scholar Night with APS and FCS Students and Families

April 2026

Achieve Atlanta hosted our largest Scholar Night to date, bringing 1,100 qualified students and their families together for an unforgettable evening celebrating community, resources, and the journey through college and beyond. As a result, more students engaged with essential post-event onboarding sessions and financial planning trainings than in previous years.



Partner Learning Forum

June 2026

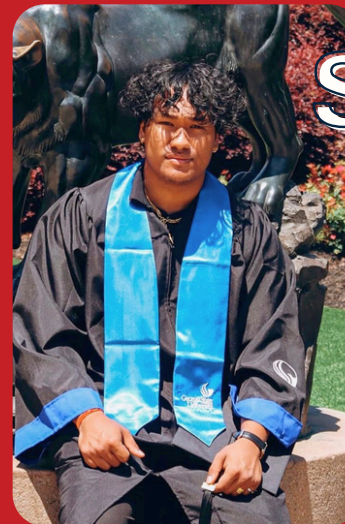
Achieve Atlanta hosted our annual Partner Learning Forum, where the largest turnout of postsecondary partners in our history gathered to align on the Scholar Journey, which establishes a universal level of support for all Scholars. Achieve Atlanta provided partners with data on Scholar progress and challenges, communicated key organizational priorities and upcoming initiatives, and facilitated collaborative learning focused on persistence and completion outcomes. The event sparked action across our partner network in support of Scholar success.



Providing More Scholars with PIN Internship Experiences

May 2026

Achieve Atlanta strengthened our focus on college persistence and career readiness through an expanded collaboration with the Partnership for Innovation (PIN). The program grew from seven to 14 Achieve Atlanta Scholars, connecting more students to paid, high-quality summer internships that provide valuable professional experience, build networks and confidence, and translate college persistence into strong early-career momentum and post-graduation opportunities.



Sudev

Georgia State University, Class of 2026

Major: Public health

APS High School: Midtown High School

Next Steps: Pursuing a Master of Public Health in Behavioral, Social, and Health Education Sciences at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health

“Achieve Atlanta has provided financial support and valuable coaching throughout my undergraduate journey. The team has empowered me to pursue my passion in public health and work toward improving health outcomes for individuals and communities.”

ACHIEVE ATLANTA: BY THE NUMBERS

AS OF SEPTEMBER 2026



8,786

Achieve Atlanta Scholars since our founding in 2015

50% 
are first-generation college students



439

different postsecondary institutions across the country have welcomed our Scholars



93%

of Scholars are Black or Latinx

96%

are eligible for Pell Grants



More than
\$75 million 

in scholarship funds (provided through spring 2026)

OUR SCHOLARS HAVE PURSUED



79% bachelor's degree

21% associate degree or technical degree/certificate

A DECADE OF SCHOLAR SUCCESS



Share of APS seniors applying to three or more colleges grew from 46% in 2016 to

81%
in 2026.

FAFSA completion among APS seniors increased from 51% in 2016 to

78% in 2026.



More APS graduates are making the transition to higher education, with seamless enrollment rising from 51% in 2015 to

59% in 2025. 

Since our first cohort entered college 10 years ago,

2,425 Scholars have earned a degree or credential. 



Areonna

University of Kentucky, Class of 2026

Major: Nursing

APS High School: Daniel McLaughlin Therrell High School

Next Steps: Starting her career as a registered nurse

"As a graduate of Therrell High School and an out-of-state college student, receiving the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship in 2022 was a blessing that helped make my college journey possible. Their support allowed me to focus on my education while balancing work, serving as a Resident Advisor for three years, and being involved in nursing leadership opportunities."

“As a first-generation college student from south Atlanta, graduating debt-free with honors is a dream I once thought was impossible, but Achieve Atlanta helped turn that vision into my reality.”

— Akasha, South Atlanta High School '21, Georgia State University '26



Jerrell

Southern University and A&M College, Class of 2026

Major: Biology

APS High School: Benjamin E. Mays High School

Next Steps: Pursuing a master's degree in biomedical sciences and preparing for dental school

“Achieve Atlanta has been a huge support system for me during college by providing guidance, encouragement, and resources that helped me stay focused on my goals and continue pursuing my education.”





LOOKING AHEAD

As we look ahead to our next strategic planning process, we remain united around our bold 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 Scholarship recipients on a path to upward mobility upon graduation.

The successful expansion of our Scholarship to two new high schools in Fulton County laid the groundwork for a second wave of growth scheduled for the 2026–2027 school year. Achieve Atlanta remains committed to our powerful work in Atlanta Public Schools while increasing college access to students across Metro Atlanta.



David

Tuskegee University, Class of 2026

Major: Mechanical Engineering

APS High School: KIPP Atlanta Collegiate

Next Steps: Starting his career as a manufacturing engineer with Procter & Gamble

“Achieve Atlanta gave me the support and community I needed to stay focused, step into leadership, and make the most of every opportunity throughout my college journey.”

OUR PARTNERS

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



2025-26 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Claire "Yum" Arnold, Board Chair
CEO, Leapfrog IT Services

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

Dr. Tim Renick
Executive Director, National Institute for Student Success

Dr. Greg Vaughn
Leadership Consultant, Spencer Stuart

Kathy Waller
Executive Director, Atlanta Committee for Progress

2025-26 FUNDERS

JOSEPH B. WHITEHEAD FOUNDATION

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Delta Community Credit Union
Dr. Tim Renick
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