



Achieve Atlanta  
Webinar Q&As

Thank you for joining us on November 16, 2022, for our webinar on the Summary Finding of an [Independent Evaluation of Achieve Atlanta](#). Below, please find the questions we did not have time to answer during the webinar. If you have questions or comments, please contact us at [info@achieveatlanta.org](mailto:info@achieveatlanta.org).

Q. The results seem quite significant. What policy recommendations do you take from this study?

A. For Georgia's economic future, we need more young people to earn postsecondary degrees – particularly bachelor's degrees. In 2014, only 14% of Atlanta Public Schools students were projected to earn a postsecondary credential of any kind within six years of their graduation. This low degree attainment represented an economic crisis. That is why Achieve Atlanta was founded in 2015.

This is not an unsolvable problem. Georgia is one of only two states in the U.S. that does not provide broad need-based financial aid to college students. Through our work, Achieve Atlanta and our partners have demonstrated that when students are given the right funding assistance and support services, more of them persist and complete college. Ultimately, Georgia needs to provide more need-based financial aid for postsecondary education.

Q. I'm wondering if the University of Systems of Georgia's decision to go [test-optional](#) three years ago has possibly increased access to college for students and if it has also impacted their ability to qualify for need-based aid?

A. In this post-COVID world, colleges are constantly changing requirements both for admissions and access to financial aid. It's really early to know the implications of test-optional and whether it will lead to strong access or persistence for our students. We have seen first-hand that it certainly has affected students' choice of *where they go* to school, but it's unclear whether it affects *if they go to school or whether they persist* in college once enrolled."

Test-optional is a case for admission, but it's not always the case for financial aid determinations. While many admissions decisions are test-optional, some institutions still use test scores to award merit aid, as do a number of outside scholarship organizations. You can see how this creates a very complex and murky situation for students. That is why, while we agree test-optional may remove



some barriers to admissions, we're concerned that being test-optional may create unintended consequences for students to secure funding to make college affordable.

You can read the current University of System of Georgia's test-optional policy [here](#), and additional information can be found in this September 8, 2022, [AJC article](#).

**Q. What are the most pressing implications of the independent analysis?**

**A.** These findings validate that our scholarship, cross-sector collaboration, and support are having an impact on the students we serve. Not only are they persisting in college at higher rates than non-scholars, but the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship is helping make college more affordable.

These effects are most concentrated among Scholars with GPAs between 80-90, many of whom do not have access to HOPE Scholarship or HOPE Grant funding. Nearly two-thirds of Achieve Atlanta Scholars are in the concentration GPA range, which had the greatest impact.

Given the largest effects for students just below the HOPE Scholarship threshold, these results also provide policymakers with important data on the potential impact of broader need-based aid in Georgia.

**Q. How can the Achieve Atlanta program be duplicated for other metro-Atlanta area school systems that serve a similar student population?**

**A.** While we can't say how this result definitively would apply in other school districts or compare to similar students at other school systems, we hope our evaluation catalyzes discussion in communities across Georgia and the country about the importance of cross-sector collaborations to solve the challenge of college access and affordability. At the core of our model are our partners and the trust we have built to serve APS students together with various supports and services.

We also can't say that any individual part of our model caused these results. So if a community is looking to duplicate what we're doing here in Atlanta, the services have to go hand in hand with providing financial aid.