

20

IMPACT  
REPORT

23

**BELIEVE.  
EXPECT.  
ACHIEVE.**



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# LETTER FROM CHERYL

Are you familiar with the *Magic Eye* series of 3D illusion books? Engineers Tom Baccei and Cheri Smith began creating them in 1991, and the images in the books are random dot autostereograms. The books include an “enchancing 3D object or scene that materializes before the viewer’s eyes.” I was a big fan of the books years ago and enjoyed the satisfaction of studying the images until I discovered the hidden “gem” within each one.

My first few months at Achieve Atlanta resembled the *Magic Eye* experience. My introduction to our eight-year history, our team and leadership, students and Scholars, partners, programs, places, operations, stories, and protocols has felt at times like seeing the unique pieces of a giant puzzle. While I am still learning about the Achieve Atlanta story, I can already see the magical way our team works in service of our mission and the cross-sector collaborative approach that many consider our “secret sauce.”

I joined this passionate team in May and was proud to learn more about the independent research by Georgia State University’s Georgia Policy Labs that shows students who receive the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship and support services persist in college at much higher rates than similar peers who did not receive our Scholarship and support.

In 2022, Achieve Atlanta transitioned from pandemic-era remote work and moved into our new offices, where we now work on a hybrid schedule. We continue to support Atlanta Public Schools students in innovative ways while also working with our partners to help Achieve Atlanta Scholars complete their postsecondary credentials. **With more than 1,400 Achieve Atlanta alumni out in the world, we have increased our focus on building a network among alumni and connecting our college graduates to strong career paths and resources. We have also seen progress and improvements on several of our major organization-wide goals—an encouraging sign that we can expect progress in other areas in the near future.**

The past year has been full of accomplishments—all while our organization has navigated transitions and growth. This year’s report not only highlights our students’ achievements, but also our organization’s proven impact. Mahatma Gandhi said, “The future depends on what we do in the present.” I recognize my responsibility to help champion our continued success and keep our partners and community motivated around our vision to ensure that race and income no longer predict postsecondary success and upward mobility in Atlanta. I am excited about the next chapter in Achieve Atlanta’s success story!



Onward and upward,

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

**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.

### **INTENTIONAL COLLABORATION**

We cannot achieve our vision alone. We deliberately build partnerships that work toward common goals and create sustainable growth and change.

### **CONTINUOUS INNOVATION**

We are relentlessly curious and encourage thoughtful risk-taking. We must be nimble enough to pursue promising ideas, yet humble enough to learn from the outcomes.

### **CHAMPION FOR STUDENTS**

Our belief in students is backed by action. With their dreams as the foundation for our work, we break down systemic barriers, earn trust, and build capacity so that, ultimately, students can be their own champions.

### **EXPECTATION OF EXCELLENCE**

Excellence requires effort, tenacity, responsibility, and integrity that lead to high-quality work. It is the standard we set for ourselves and the model we demonstrate to students and our community of stakeholders.

## HOW WE STARTED

A 2014 study commissioned by the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta and the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation found that only 1 in 7 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 SCHOLARSHIP

All APS graduates who finish their last two years of high school in Atlanta Public Schools, have at least a 2.5 GPA, and meet income requirements are eligible. The Scholarship provides \$5,000/year for four years in bachelor's programs and \$1,500/year for two years in associate or technical programs. Scholars must retain a 2.0 GPA and enroll full time to continue to receive the Scholarship.



**5,130**

Achieve Atlanta Scholars since our founding

More than  
**\$44** million  
in Scholarship funds paid out through spring 2023



Scholars have attended

**355**

different postsecondary institutions across the country

**1/3**

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

Our Scholars have pursued:

Bachelor's Degree **80%**

Associate Degree **18%**

Technical Degree **2%**

# SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

## MYLA WILLIAMS

Georgia State University, Class of 2024  
Carver Early College, 2021 Cohort



From the classroom to her extracurricular activities, Myla Williams has taken advantage of a number of opportunities both on campus and in her community. Myla chose to attend Georgia State University (GSU) for several reasons. As a high school senior at Carver Early College, she was looking for a diverse university close to home, with great political science programs, and where all of her dual enrollment credits would be counted.

Myla's interest in law and justice started at 8 years old, when she decided that she wanted to be a lawyer. Once she finally sat in her first college political science class years later, she knew she had found her niche. Through GSU's political science program, Myla took multiple classes that inspired her to pursue a minor in criminal justice. She also worked as a legal intern at the Fulton County District Attorney's Office and is currently an undergraduate research assistant for Georgia Policy Labs.

As an Achieve Atlanta Scholar, Myla has felt supported on her academic journey and with her extracurricular activities. She has held several executive board positions for the Student Government Association (including Executive Vice President), is a key member of the Black Sophomore Society, and has hosted numerous student-led events to promote mental health awareness.

Outside of campus, Myla works as the chief of staff for the Georgia Youth Justice Coalition, an organization that encourages young people to be involved in politics and helps them advocate for youth power and justice in Georgia. In the future, she hopes to become a prosecuting attorney before becoming a judge or Supreme Court justice.

**"My advice to Scholars or students who are considering applying for the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship is to use the scholarship beyond its financial services. Go to Achieve Atlanta's events and utilize its resources when you need something because you can get a lot more out of the program than just what's being deposited into your school tuition portal."**

- Myla Williams



# OUR IMPACT AND RESULTS



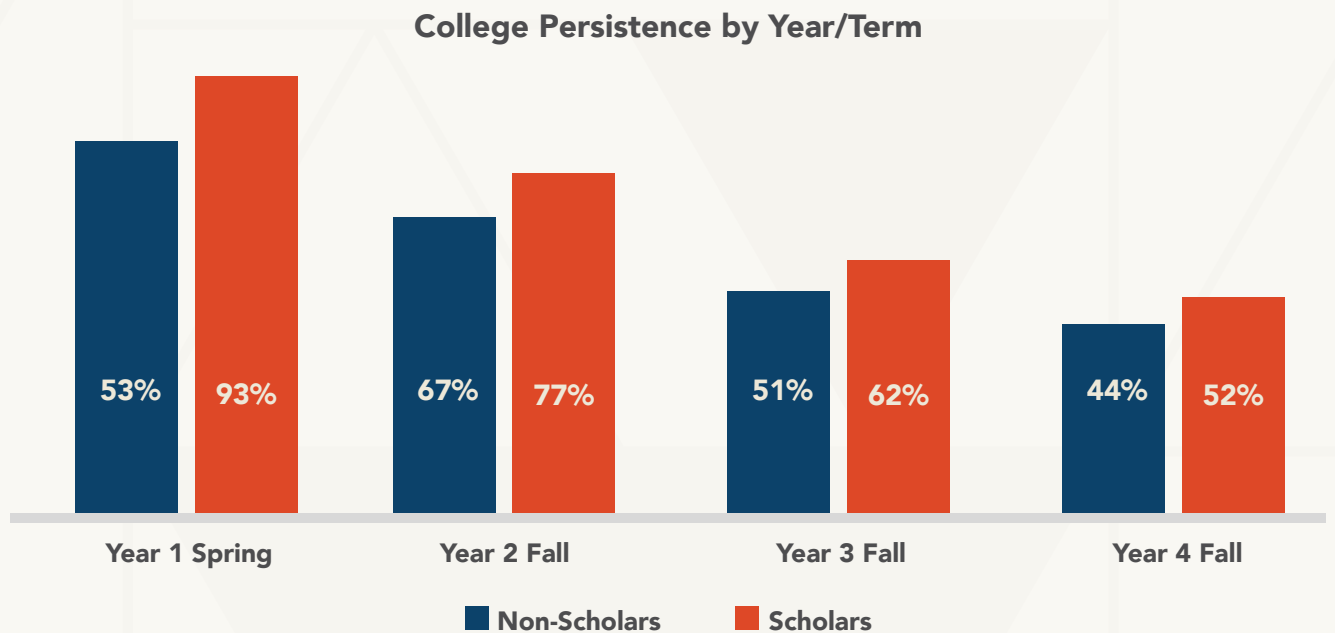
## Achieve Atlanta's Scholarship and Services Substantially Increase College Persistence and Completion

Research by Georgia State University's Georgia Policy Labs (GPL) shows that students receiving the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship and support services persist in college at much higher rates than similar peers who did not receive the Scholarship and support. These results begin during the second semester of their freshman year and last through at least the fourth year of college. Additionally, these effects are most concentrated among students with mid-range high school GPAs, many of whom are not eligible for Georgia's merit-based HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships. This represents about two-thirds of all Achieve Atlanta Scholars.

GPL researchers set out to answer this question: Does the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship and

complementary support impact college persistence and completion? **The answer is yes. Achieve Atlanta's scholarship and support significantly increase students' persistence through college.** Specifically, students who receive the Scholarship and support are 11 percentage points more likely to persist to their second semester in college than their peers who are similar academically and demographically but did not receive the scholarship and support. And, the improved persistence through college continues at full strength through subsequent semesters. Further, Achieve Atlanta's first cohort of Scholars graduated at a rate nearly five percentage points higher than similar non-Scholars.

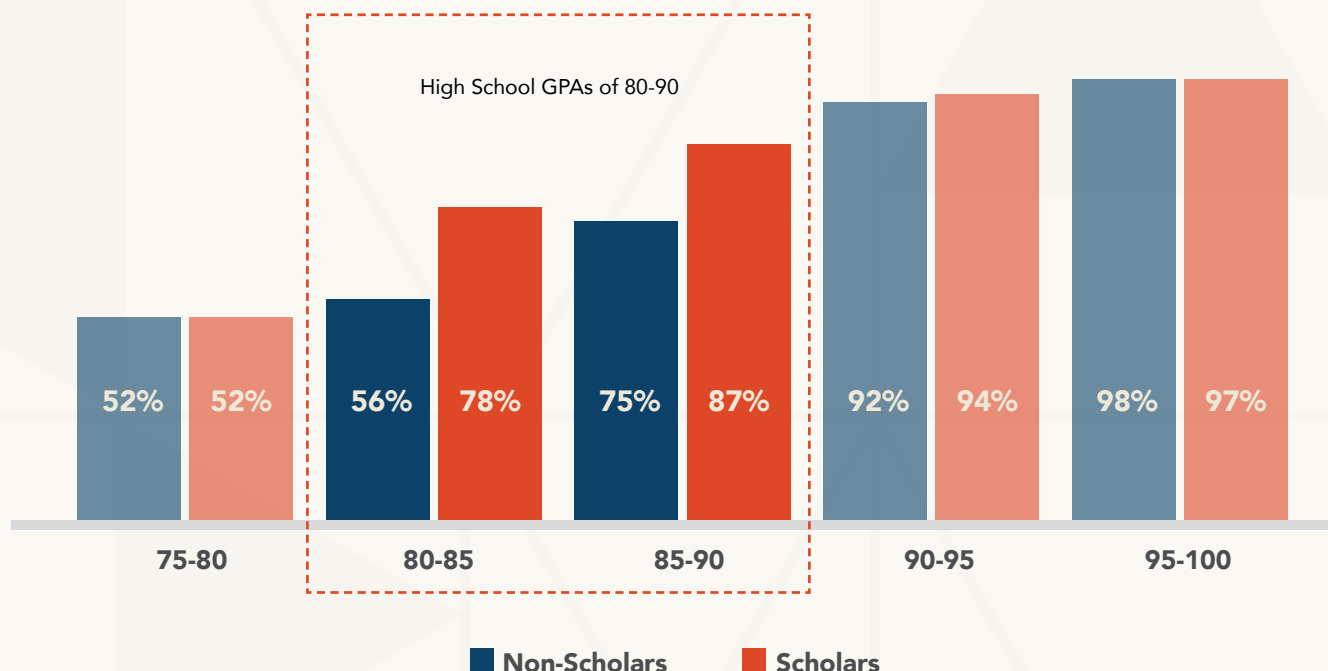
**Beginning the second semester of their first year, Achieve Atlanta Scholars persist well above similar non-Scholar APS graduates who enroll in college. These gains last for at least four years.**



College persistence as reported from the National Student Clearinghouse. Retention of Achieve Atlanta Scholarship is not considered, only whether the student remained enrolled or earned a credential.

**Increases in persistence are concentrated among students with GPAs of 80–90, who are less likely to be eligible for the HOPE Scholarship.**

**Year 2 Fall Persistence Comparison Between Scholars and Non-Scholars**



Darker-colored bars = statistically significant difference between non-Scholars and Scholars  
Lighter-colored bars = no statistically significant difference between non-Scholars and Scholars

**These findings validate that Achieve Atlanta’s scholarship, collaboration, and support positively impact the college success of Atlanta Public Schools students.**

In addition to monitoring these same measures in future years, Georgia Policy Labs will expand its evaluation of Achieve Atlanta through a research-practice partnership grant received in 2022. Over the next two years, GPL will evaluate Achieve Atlanta’s impact on student financial wellness, involve Scholars in qualitative research on how they finance their college education, and test the impact of a financial counseling intervention.

The study was conducted by Jonathan Smith (Georgia State University), Lindsay Page (Brown University), and Carycruz Bueno (Wesleyan University).

## POSTSECONDARY ACCESS OUTCOMES

The annual number of graduates enrolling in college has increased by almost 300 students since 2015, due to both recent increases in the APS high school graduation rate and our support of college enrollment. Although we will not have enrollment data for the class of 2023 until well into 2024, we expect a modest increase, in alignment with our leading indicators below.

The share of seniors from the class of 2023 completing college-going milestones increased from last year. In collaboration with APS, College Advising Corps, and OneGoal, we reached our four goals for high school seniors (one-on-one college advising meetings, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, number of students with at least three college applications, and Achieve Atlanta Scholarship application completions) for the first time since the 2017-18 school year.

For the class of 2022,



**55%**  
**OF APS GRADUATES**

enrolled in postsecondary education the fall after high school graduation

For the class of 2023,



**47%**  
**OF SENIORS**

completed the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship application (compared with an estimated 42% last year)



**71%**  
**OF SENIORS**

completed the FAFSA (up from 66% last year). This outcome far outpaced the state (50%) and the nation (51%)



**79%**  
**OF SENIORS**

completed three or more college applications (compared with 71% last year)

## POSTSECONDARY AFFORDABILITY OUTCOMES

In addition to the Achieve Atlanta Scholarship, since spring 2020, we have partnered with Scholarship America to administer an emergency grant program to reduce the impact of financial emergencies on Scholars' ability to stay on track in school. Emergencies include circumstances such as job loss, car trouble, or unexpected medical expenses.

In addition, our completion grant program supports students who have exhausted their standard scholarship awards but have yet to earn a degree. Last year, the Tull Charitable Foundation provided \$700,000 to bolster this program and help Scholars who need additional funding to complete.

With more than



**\$70K**  
**IN GRANTS**

we supported more than  
150 Scholars facing financial  
emergencies this past year

Completion grants  
supported a total of



**103**  
**SCHOLARS**

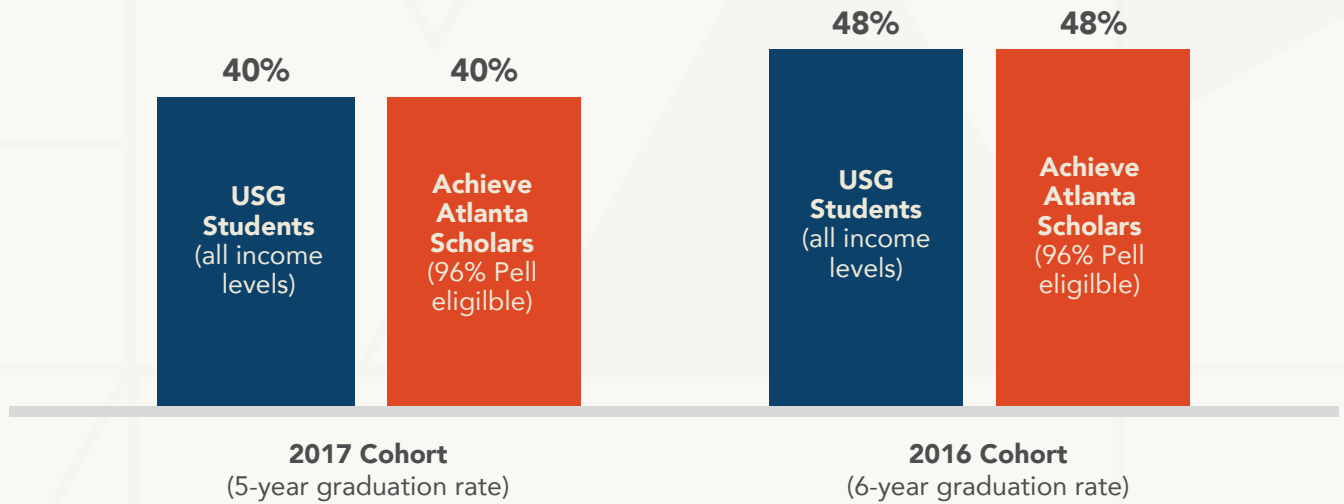
studying at 27 colleges and universities,  
helping to close their funding gaps and  
propel them toward degree completion



## POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS OUTCOMES

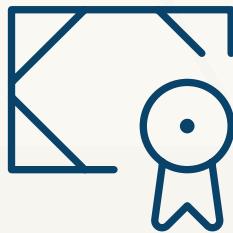
The first two Achieve Atlanta cohorts that enrolled in University System of Georgia (USG) institutions graduated at the same rate as all students at those institutions, regardless of income status.

### Graduation Rates for Achieve Atlanta Scholars Compared with All University System of Georgia (USG) Students



\*USG graduation rate as of the fall 2022 term for full-time, first-time students by institution. USG rates by institution are weighted by the proportion of Achieve Atlanta Scholars attending each institution. 72% of Scholars attend USG institutions.

Since the launch of our Scholarship seven years ago,



**1,412** have earned a degree or credential  
**SCHOLARS**

\*As of September 2023



# ACHIEVE ATLANTA ALUMNI

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

## JONATHAN BURKE

Louisiana State University, Class of 2023  
North Atlanta High School, 2019 Cohort

Although he was once the shy kid at school, Jonathan Burke's four-year college journey transformed him into a confident young adult as he navigated multiple personal challenges, including losing his father. When Jonathan graduated from North Atlanta High School, he knew he wanted to attend Louisiana State University (LSU) to earn a mass communications degree with a focus on political communication, along with a minor in entrepreneurship. However, Jonathan did not think his dream school was financially feasible.

Alongside his academics, Jonathan participated in several campus organizations. He led the executive board of the Black Student Union, helping it grow from 40 members to more than 750 during his tenure. As the African-American Cultural Center's lead student worker, a student government representative, and a participant in multiple student presidential campaigns, he worked to create a more welcoming environment for Black students on LSU's campus. These experiences allowed Jonathan to hone his communication and leadership skills while also utilizing marketing, video, and editing expertise gained in his college courses.



During the summer before his senior year, Jonathan landed an internship at global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company. This experience expanded his professional knowledge and skills in client relations, partnership, and planning. This fall, Jonathan returned to LSU to earn an MBA before pursuing a career in consulting or marketing.

**"When I first started applying to colleges, out-of-state schools were out of the question. . . Applying to one more scholarship—Achieve Atlanta—helped me secure the funds I needed to pursue a university that changed my life forever. . . I can't thank anyone but God, family, friends, and Achieve Atlanta for making this possible."**

- Jonathan Burke

# ACHIEVE ATLANTA

## ALUMNI PROFILES



**JOSEPH HUNTER**

### **Albany State University, Class of 2022**

Major: Visual & Performing Arts

APS High School: G.W. Carver High School

Next steps: Working in Fulton County Schools at an elementary after-school program while pursuing a career in the entertainment industry and launching a mentoring program for young boys

*"There's no doubt you can achieve it if you believe it. Thank you, Achieve Atlanta!"*



**TALEAH SHROPSHIRE**

### **Georgia State University, Class of 2023**

Major: Journalism, with a concentration in Public Relations

APS High School: Maynard Holbrook Jackson High School

Next steps: Pursuing a career in event marketing

*"Thanks to Achieve Atlanta, I was able to receive a scholarship that helped cover my college tuition, a mentor who helped me navigate the college process, and my first internship opportunity. I am looking forward to seeing what the future holds, and I know that their continued assistance will be a valuable asset in helping me achieve my goals."*



**EVAN FLEMMING**

### **Fisk University, Class of 2022**

Major: Biology

APS High School: Charles R. Drew Charter School

Next steps: Attending medical school at Ross University School of Medicine

*"Achieve Atlanta made my dream of going to college a reality, and I try to pay their generosity forward however I can."*



**JA'KIA KEMP**

### **Kennesaw State University, Class of 2023**

Major: Biology

APS High School: Benjamin E. Mays High School

Next steps: Pursuing a career in clinical research

*"Achieve Atlanta had a huge impact on my college experience. They connected me with a once-in-a-lifetime experience to go on a study abroad trip to Ghana with my classmates. They've supported me in many ways—especially with all the events they offered on campus, and I truly thank Achieve Atlanta for everything!"*





**TABIUS MCCOY**

**Georgia Tech, Class of 2023**

Major: Business Administration

APS High School: KIPP Atlanta Collegiate

Next steps: Attending graduate school at Columbia University

*"Achieve Atlanta has played a pivotal role in helping me navigate Georgia Tech over the past three years by serving as a support system and ensuring I was put in the right place to succeed. As an Achieve Atlanta campus ambassador, I also helped bridge the gap between APS and Georgia Tech for other Scholars. I really appreciate the program and all it has done for me."*



**MONTORRIA CLEMMONS**

**University of Alabama at Birmingham, Class of 2022**

Major: Public Health

APS High School: Midtown High School

Next steps: Preparing for the Dental Admission Test to enter dental school

*"Achieve Atlanta instilled in me that success is where preparation and opportunity meet. This organization has not only helped me progress, but also provided resources and tools for me to succeed—while giving me opportunities as I embark on my future endeavors."*



**MYLES DUNN**

**Emory University, Class of 2023**

Major: Business Administration

APS High School: G.W. Carver Early College

Next steps: Working as a music central assistant at William Morris Endeavor

*"Achieve Atlanta equipped me with the tools to successfully navigate my college career. I wouldn't be in this position today without their guidance and support!"*



**JAMIYA TRAYLOR**

**Clayton State University, Class of 2023**

Major: Nursing

APS High School: Frederick Douglass High School

Next steps: Working as a surgical trauma registered nurse at Grady Memorial Hospital

*"I would like to thank Achieve Atlanta for playing a major role in my education. Nursing school was stressful, but I never had to worry about how I was going to pay for anything. Achieve Atlanta was always there to check on me and follow up to ensure everything was still going as planned. Huge thanks to both Drs. Barker and Coach Chuck (Jamiya's coaches through Achieve Atlanta)!"*



## Collaborating to Support Students' Transitions to the Workforce

As we work toward realizing our vision of not just postsecondary success but also upward mobility, we continue to collaborate with partners to support students as they transition into the workforce.

We convened a group of peer organizations with experts from Braven, the Georgia Chamber, Georgia State University, the Metro Atlanta Chamber, and Spelman College to understand why some Scholars struggle to gain employment within their chosen career path and earn compensation that reflects their qualifications. The group identified strategies that could be piloted during college and set metrics to track progress.

In March, the group hosted a mock interview event at Georgia State University for senior

Scholars attending Georgia State University and Spelman College. Participating Scholars engaged in multiple mock interviews with employers from 20 companies. Feedback from Scholars and employers was positive, and we look forward to holding a similar event next year.

We also engaged alumni directly by hosting informational sessions on social media ("Alumni Direct"), covering topics such as applying to graduate school, maintaining mental health, improving financial literacy, and building effective LinkedIn profiles.

Through these collective efforts, we have created foundational relationships with Scholar alumni to help bridge the college-to-career transition for future graduates.

# 2022-23 HIGHLIGHTS



Achieve Atlanta played a significant role in the 2022 National College Attainment Network's annual conference held in Atlanta last October. Former Achieve Atlanta Executive Director Tina Fernandez and Achieve Atlanta Board Member Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum participated in a fireside chat during a plenary session; our College Access and Scholarship & Affordability teams presented to roundtable groups; and an Achieve Atlanta Scholar, Morgan Forbes, spoke on a panel about financial aid challenges.



We welcomed our new President/Executive Director, Cheryl Watson-Harris, Ed.D., in May 2023! In her first month, she kicked off our second Scholar Night, enjoyed meeting many of our partners, attended several APS graduations, and welcomed our new cohort of campus ambassadors. In the coming months, Dr. Watson-Harris and the executive leadership team will partner with an external firm to lead Achieve Atlanta through a strategic planning process that will engage students, staff, partners, and other stakeholders to chart how we can best execute our mission and vision over the next three years.



More than 550 APS seniors and their families joined us for one of two Scholar Nights held in April at Charles R. Drew Charter School and Benjamin E. Mays High School. Over two nights, we introduced APS seniors to what it means to become Achieve Atlanta Scholars, provided tips on the transition to college, and connected them with coaches who will support them. Attendees said their favorite part of the evening was our panel discussion with a current Scholar, an Achieve Atlanta alum, and the parent of an alum.



In December 2022, we hosted the first Achieve Atlanta Homecoming event at Ponce City Market—an opportunity for more than 60 Scholars and alumni to network, play games, and get to know the Achieve Atlanta team. We plan to make this an annual event.



# **PARTNERING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

# OUR PARTNERS

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.





# ACHIEVE ATLANTA STAFF

**Stacy Boone**

Director, Postsecondary Partnerships

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Manager, Operations

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**William Tran**

Senior Director, Operations & Systems

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Senior Director, Data Analytics & Insights

**Cheryl Watson-Harris, Ed.D.**

President/Executive Director

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