



*...opening a world of possibilities*

## FOUR YEARS OF GROWTH

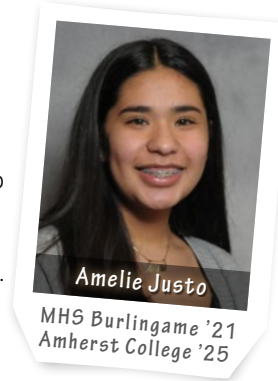
When I received my acceptance letter to Mercy SF and to the **achieve** program, my mother began to cry, filled with relief. Her goal for her four children was to make sure that they got the best education, and she made sacrifices to do so. She feared she would not be able to afford a private high school, so **achieve** was truly a blessing.

I was very nervous when I began **achieve**'s summer school before my freshman year. I was scared that I would not know how to make new friends. I envied the Riordan boys in our program because it seemed so easy for them to talk to each other. Meanwhile, it took the Mercy girls almost a week to come out of our shells and say hello, but I am sure glad we did!

Thanks to **achieve**, I became involved in the campus community and met many amazing people. Before **achieve**, I barely knew anything about the world of theater, but after attending shows at SF Playhouse, I was astonished by the power of theater and wanted to be a part of what brings a show to life. This led me to join Mercy's stage crew my sophomore year, where I learned to do things I never imagined doing, like using power drills and working a soundboard. It felt so good being a part of a team. Had **achieve** not pushed me to get out of my comfort zone, I doubt I would have taken the risk to get involved in theater.

My favorite **achieve** memory is of the Junior College Tour to Philadelphia. I was so nervous because I had never been that far away from my mother before, and we were not allowed to use our phones during the day. That trip turned out to be unforgettable, and oftentimes I wish I could travel back in time to that moment. I was able to imagine myself in college, away from home, and surprisingly, I did not even miss my phone!

**achieve** was there for me when times were tough. In my junior year, I was a bundle of nerves, constantly stressed. I was juggling three AP classes with late tech rehearsals, and was taking ACT prep classes at Sylvan on Sundays. On top of that, my brother, who has always been my family's rock, was moving to Chicago. My **achieve** Program Coordinator contacted the school counselor, which made me realize how much **achieve** cared for my well-being. It was great having people there to support me, even when I did not realize how much I needed it.



The summer before my senior year, I participated in the **achieve** college process. Through weekly meetings with my college advisors, I was able to dive deep within myself to figure out what I wanted in a college and what I wanted to pursue in the future. During times of self-doubt, my advisors were always there to remind me that I was a bright individual destined for greatness. When I was worried about not being able to afford college, I would take a deep breath and remind myself that I would be attending college, and this stress was just a little bump in the road.

**achieve** has provided me with guidance throughout these four years, and has shaped me into the person I am today. Through the summer internships, encouraging us to seek leadership positions, and making us present at family meetings, I was able to learn all that I am capable of and discover my passions. Without **achieve**, I would never have been able to attend Mercy and meet the most incredible students and teachers. Most importantly, I would never have considered going to an out-of-state college. I will be attending Amherst College in the fall, knowing I will have my **achieve** family rooting for me every step of the way.

### CLASS OF 2021 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

\*attending

Agnes Scott College*	Colgate University*	Gustavus Adolphus College	Oberlin College*
Albion College	College of the Holy Cross	Hope College*	Rhodes College
Allegheny College*	College of Wooster	Kalamazoo College	Ripon College
Amherst College*	DePauw University	Kenyon College	Skidmore College
Berea College	Denison University	Lawrence University	St. Olaf College*
Boston College	Earlham College	Lehigh University	Valparaiso University
Clark University (MA)*	Emory & Henry College	Macalester College*	Wheaton College (MA)
Coe College	Gettysburg College*	Mount Holyoke College*	Whitman College

# MEMORIES

Looking back, I am beyond pleased to have made the decision to attend SJND and be part of **achieve**. The **achieve** Program gave me the opportunity to experience new things, such as watching plays at the SF Playhouse. I was a young and rigid kid who had a natural inclination for sticking to things that were familiar and safe, and I considered live theater archaic and not for me. I realized this way of thinking was totally wrong after watching my first couple of plays my freshman year. I relished the immediacy of the events unfolding right in front of me onstage. And I was mesmerized by the talented actors who were able to memorize all their lines and perform without a single hiccup. This sparked a sense of encouragement in me to be more confident and to step out of my comfort zone in school and in life in general.

The **achieve** Program has helped me uncover interests I never knew I had, like volunteering. In the beginning, I was not happy having to wake up early on my weekends to work, but after my first experience at Alameda County Community Food Bank, I learned how much I enjoyed helping others. Volunteering has helped me understand that even helping out with the smallest task can make a real difference in the lives of people and organizations in need. For this reason, I will continue to

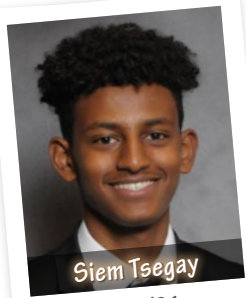
be an active volunteer in college by joining various clubs like Habitat for Humanity.

**achieve** gave me the amazing opportunity to be a part of a summer program called Children's Hospital Oakland Research Institute. CHORI was helpful in many ways, but it was invaluable in the experience I got from working with a research scientist and listening to weekly lectures from a variety of medical professionals, most notably an orthopedic surgeon, discussing her work in Uganda. I loved this program because it involved medicine, and it taught me that a career in research might be for me.

Finally, **achieve** has helped me out a lot in my college process. I cannot imagine having completed this process without the support of my college coach. Because of her assistance, I received acceptances and many scholarships and grants to nine schools so far.

The mentorship and advice that **achieve** provided these past four years has helped me achieve academic success and obtain skills necessary to overcome obstacles. I learned the importance of stepping out of my comfort zone and to feel comfortable in my own skin. I also learned not to let hesitation get in the way of my decision making. I was burned once because I let indecision stymie my ability to make a decision, and the feeling of regret was painful. I learned it is better to say "oops" than "what if?" Failure is temporary; regret is forever.

High school seemed like it passed by really fast, but I have made life-long friendships and created many good memories. Thank you, **achieve**, for supporting me throughout this journey.



Siem Tsegay  
SJND '21  
Macalester College '25

## POSITIVE & NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PAINTING PROJECT



Jazmine Moran  
MHSB '24



While volunteering at the SF Campus for Jewish Living, **achieve** Scholars from Mercy Burlingame created paintings representing the positive and negative effects of Covid-19. Jazmine said, "I used this painting to describe how, even though we as a family are staying together at home, we don't always know how everyone is feeling on the inside... I had a really great experience getting to know some of the elders at the Campus for Jewish Living. I found out that even with our age difference, we still have many things in common."

# MY JOURNEY AS AN ACHIEVE SCHOLAR

My life has not always been easy. When I was accepted into the **achieve** Program, I was reading at a substantially lower than 8th-grade level and still overcoming my struggles in math. It took these past four years of consistency and dedication to overcome these challenges, but it built an exceptional drive in me. Wanting to achieve something for myself, and learning how to work for it, built my character and confidence.

The **achieve** Program has been a stepping stone for me to better myself. The past four years, I have attended cultural events on the weekends, had summer internships, and participated in community service. I learned quickly what my priorities were and that it was my responsibility to take advantage of all the great opportunities I was given. I struggled a little my freshman year, but junior year was a turning point for me. I was given the opportunity to go to Tanzania. Seeing young African girls who will give up everything to get an education was heartwarming and motivating. Before I left, we climbed a mountain and though not all of us could handle it, my determination to get to the top meant more to me than being tired. I took a picture in front of the waterfall and sat down to take everything in. This trip symbolized what **achieve** has meant to me. It has not been easy, but with determination and hard work, I can succeed. **achieve** has given me the tools to allow me to reach the top.

In addition, **achieve** has taught me different types of etiquette. At the annual **achieve** Christmas parties, I learned when to use which utensil, I learned that men should stand up when ladies are excusing themselves from the table, and lastly, I learned to

socialize at the table at the appropriate time. I will take this knowledge with me into adulthood.

As an **achieve** Scholar, I was taught how to interview. Now I never feel unprepared or fearful when walking into an interview. My first **achieve** internship interview was so intense. Even though I had prepared, I still felt unsure of myself. I constantly went over the rules in my head: do not chew gum; do not wear earphones; when asked a question do not use filler words; remember to schedule your hours or discuss an email that will be sent to schedule your hours; etc. Now that I have gone through numerous internships and college interviews and have done great in all of them, I can say **achieve** taught me well.

**achieve** taught me to take care of myself as a woman and person. I learned to always push to do better and never be unprepared. There is always someone who wants the same thing as you, but you have to work smarter and harder. I am very grateful to the **achieve** Program for providing opportunities that I could not have experienced anywhere else.

Being an **achieve** Scholar opened my eyes up to who I am as an individual. I know what I believe, what I am worth, and how to speak up as a Black woman. Wherever I end up in life, I want to know that I worked hard for what I am passionate about. I will continue to keep my eye on the prize.



Natalie Hoang, Israel Fuentes, Gloria Ulloa-Soto, 2021 Gerson Bakar Achievement Award recipients



Felix Alfaro, Carolina Gomez, Daniel Chan-Artiga, 2021 Jacob Valdiviezo, Michael Lech, Tyrone McGraw Scholarship recipients



East Bay Scholars collect toys for Oakland Fire Department's 2020 Toy Drive



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## DEVELOPING A LEADER



I remember looking at an email stating that I would have to go to Riordan for an interview for a program called “**achieve**.” I didn’t quite understand what the interview entailed, but as I would soon realize, it would be about my future and one of the best things that has ever happened to me. At the end of my interview, I was told that **achieve** was looking for future leaders – and that I was one. I left that day and was ecstatic to start **achieve**’s summer school. We spent some time writing essays and making sure that we were engaged in conversation with our fellow **achieve** brothers and sisters. We had lunch together, and on some occasions, we went out and explored the city. From the very beginning, **achieve** was aiding us in forming bonds and community, even before we entered high school. This made the transition that much easier because I had familiar faces. I had a family.

So began the first day of high school. As much as I wanted to trick myself into thinking that I was outgoing and able to make new friends easily, I found it difficult. I would notice activities at school that would entice me, but that I did not have the courage to go forth and do. I remember one of the academic counselors of **achieve** asking me if I had seen sign-ups for the fall play, to which I responded, “Yeah, but I’ve never done theatre.” My counselor then proceeded to tell me to not be afraid and see how it goes. This idea of being insecure about trying new things would slowly fade away.

**achieve** provided us with many opportunities, which allowed me to grow, make myself known in my school, and discover who I was. Live theater allowed us to empathize with the characters onstage, the Christmas party helped us form even stronger bonds with our brothers and sisters, and the internships provided unique experiences. It was through these activities that I was able to find joy, and they served as some sort of escape to a second family whose duty was to push and fortify me. **achieve** provided me with a support system. Now more than ever, when we have been constrained to the four walls within our houses, we need people that we can confide in, and I am glad to have been able to find these people in the **achieve** Program.

Surprisingly, what turned out to be the most nerve-wracking moment while in the **achieve** program is, in fact, the moment I look back on with the most fondness. I remember arriving at my first Christmas Party and opening one of the brochures to find my name in the talent show section. I was going to play the accordion, and this was my first crowd that was not my parents or the family dog. My heart was racing the whole time, but the moment I went onstage I was met with an immense amount of love from the whole **achieve** family. Everyone was clapping and cheering me on and it was exactly what I needed. Looking back, it gave me the confidence boost that I would carry throughout my high school career.

Empathy has been the one overarching theme in every opportunity that **achieve** has given me. SF Playhouse, where we attended many theatrical performances, would constantly describe itself as an “empathy gym.” As I go into this next facet of my life, I want to not only understand what someone else is going through, but to give back when someone else is in need. I wish to reciprocate for all that I have been given. No matter how small or big the impact might be, it is still going to affect someone’s life. 🎓



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