



# achieve

*...opening a world of possibilities*

## PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

As high school approached, excitement bubbled up inside of me, mixed with gnawing dread of entering a new environment not knowing a single person. But during the summer preceding high school, I met my **achieve** brothers who would inspire, challenge, and laugh with me throughout my next four years. During our time in the **achieve** Summer Program, we bonded as we read *Night*, completed literary worksheets on *Animal Farm*, and explored the streets of San Francisco during our frequent field trips. When I walked into Riordan that first day, I was not alone; I had seven **achieve** brothers with whom I would tackle high school.

During my first months of high school, I was awed by the multitude of activities available on campus. While they all looked so tempting, I was hesitant and initially planned to wait a semester or two before getting involved. Fortunately, right from the get-go, **achieve** required me to take part in at least one extracurricular activity. I chose cross country and not once have I regretted that decision. Cross country not only gave me the opportunity to stay fit and run scenic routes, but it also gave me another family with my fellow runners.

**achieve** provides the opportunity to gain experience in the professional world through summer internships. In addition to learning valuable lessons on the importance of organization, adaptability, and data analysis, these internships allowed me to explore my career interests. My internship at Berkeley Unboxing Data Science (BUDS) gave me the tools to organize, interpret, and draw conclusions from data. I soon came to realize how much I enjoyed programming, and it became one of my search criteria during the college process.

Looking back at my time at Riordan, I realize **achieve** has been preparing us for college since day one. By encouraging us to

be involved in our school community, sign up for more challenging classes, and participate in summer internships, **achieve** was getting us ready for the college application process. Beginning junior year, **achieve** helped me navigate various parts of the college application process, including standardized testing and the personal statement. Our main focus was discovering what I wanted in a college and making sure that I would get adequate financial aid. I am extremely grateful to **achieve** for helping me through this arduous process.



One of my greatest experiences in the **achieve** Program was the College Tour. On this trip, I got a feel of what it was like to be on a college campus in rural, suburban, and urban settings. The rural setting had fresh air, but it was too isolated. The urban setting was filled with things to do, but it was too crowded. Finally, we arrived at the suburban setting, and it felt “just right!” This trip proved invaluable, not only because of the marvelous sights and learning experiences, but also because of the new and strengthened bonds formed with the **achieve** students from other schools.

It is difficult to find adequate words to express how grateful I am to be part of the **achieve** Family. In addition to providing me with an incredible support system, **achieve** taught me important values that will be useful throughout my life. From the beginning, **achieve** instilled in me the importance of being open minded and going outside of my comfort zone. I learned the importance of paying it forward to my community. And most importantly, **achieve** fostered my use of THE PLANNER, which will be my tool for organizing whatever tasks I may have. As I begin to move towards the next stage of my life, I will carry these experiences, friendships, and lessons with me.

CLASS OF 2022 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES				* attending
Albion College	Cornell University*	Lawrence University	Swarthmore College*	
Allegheny College	Emory University*	Lehigh University*	Trinity College	
Beloit College	Gettysburg College	Lewis & Clark College	University of Miami	
Boston College*	Gustavus Adolphus College	Reed College	University of Puget Sound*	
Clark University	Hope College	Rhodes College	Valparaiso University*	
Coe College	Howard University*	St. Olaf College	Wesleyan University*	
College of the Holy Cross*	Juniata College*	Seattle University*	Wheaton College (MA)	
Columbia University*	Kenyon College	Smith College*	Whitman College	

## GROWING

Sometimes it feels like the world is against you, when all you need is actually within arm's reach. I was raised in the Fruitvale District of Oakland with the mentality of rising up to take advantage of every opportunity presented to me. My family comes from the rural area in Hidalgo, Mexico, and they taught me the value of hard work at a young age. I attribute my early success to my family's example of untiring diligence in their day-to-day life. If there is a way to lessen financial challenges for my family, I will jump at any opportunity. My family's well-being and happiness are always first for me. Yet in my life I have faced some hardships.

As I was finishing 7th grade, my older cousin, Said, died from gang violence. I was devastated for a while, but decided I would try to live a life that would make him proud. In my freshman year

of high school, I experienced depression and isolated myself from everyone in my life, never openly sharing how I felt. With the help of my counselor, **achieve** staff, and my **achieve** brothers, I slowly opened up and regained my confidence. I have not looked back since and instead have chosen to become someone who can be reliable and help others who might suffer in silence. Not only did my mindset grow, but so did my interests.



Aiden Montesinos

SJND '22  
Cornell University '26

## FISH IN THE SKY

If I had to draw a comparison to the person I have become at the end of high school, it would be a flying fish. You may be asking yourself, what is a flying fish? Flying fish are ray-finned fish with pectoral fins to aid them in propelling themselves out of the water and gliding in the air.

Upon entering high school, I viewed myself as a fish with plain fins. My fins could only help me navigate the hallways, they didn't have the skillsets to guide me to be successful in a classroom or professional setting. I faced uncertainty and struggled throughout my high school journey, especially freshman year. I had a difficult time speaking up for fear of judgment. This fear resided in me and followed me everywhere I went. I did not participate in class discussions unless I was called on. After

learning that I had to write and read a speech in front of students and families at multiple **achieve** family meetings, fear paralyzed my body. But through the support of **achieve** staff, I took steps to overcome one of the biggest obstacles I had been tackling. This challenge ultimately made me a better speaker and instilled in me a fearless mindset. It also allowed me to embrace setbacks and grow a kind of resiliency to persevere through any obstacles.



Janice Tran

HNHS '22  
Wesleyan University '26

**achieve** helped me to explore different fields of work through internships at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive and the Berkeley Unboxing Data Science (BUDS) program. These Internships prepared me for the professional workspace, while nurturing my passion for creativity and theater. I plan to enter the field of engineering and design prosthetics. Learning to code at BUDS my sophomore year was a privilege for someone who wants a vocation that will require it as a core understanding. I will never forget my first experience at the SF Playhouse where I was able to see Sunday in the Park with George. The focus of the play was an art piece entitled, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jette*, which carries historical significance as a prime example of pointillism. The play inspired me to study and pursue traditional art and motivated me to excel in my art courses.

I will be headed to the College of Arts & Sciences at Cornell University in the fall, in hopes of learning about languages, cultures and the arts. I will grow my knowledge alongside people who are passionate about their majors and are willing to challenge themselves while working collaboratively. **achieve** taught me to support others in their passions, and I want to help my new classmates grow. My goal is to study biomedical engineering and be a creator of objects that help make the lives of disabled people easier. If I can enhance prosthetics so that people can go about their lives seamlessly, I will be satisfied. **achieve** is close to my heart and has instilled in me the value of giving back the love and care I have received. I hope that one day my life's work will honor that value.

My most unforgettable high school memories are of my **achieve** internships, which allowed me to gain new experiences and perspectives. I learned invaluable skills, such as how to prepare for interviews, create a resume, interact with adults, and conduct myself in a professional environment. In particular, my internship last summer with CHORI allowed me to dive into various professional fields and explore different occupations through guest speakers. I discovered what I will look for in a working environment and what I hope to do in the future. Through all of my various internships, I learned to be more independent and responsible. No matter if the task at hand was small or large, I learned to handle each with the same amount of care and accountability. I formed lasting relationships and connections with my supervisors, coworkers, and peers.

Most importantly, **achieve** surrounded me with like-minded people who are driven, caring, and passionate. These people acted as my anchor throughout high school and gave me a sense of family. **achieve** has helped me find my passions through internships, encouraged me to be a lifelong volunteer, and prepared me academically for success.

High school is a period of change and exploration and I have done plenty of both. **achieve** is like a welder, adding new skills and experiences onto my fins, making them wider and stronger until I'm now ready to fly. I will take these with me and continue building upon them on my next journey, college. Because of my lived experiences, conquered obstacles, and beautiful friendships, I have grown into something I thought was impossible, a flying fish in the sky.

# FINDING MY VOICE

"Norzin does not advocate for herself." My smile quickly faded as my mom relayed this comment that my middle school teacher, Ms. Velasquez, had made in a parent-teacher conference. I was dreadfully aware of my timidness, but I also did well in whatever it was I was supposed to do, and I foolishly thought that was enough.

I was not always shy. In India, where I was born as a Tibetan refugee, I was a bubbly child. Back then, I didn't notice the unpaved dirt roads, piles of cow dung, or dusty shacks that the people of Mundgod called homes. I saw the beauty in everything. Then, my life changed, when at the age of three, I moved to the U.S.

Growing up, the incessant clamor of the car wash next to my apartment, the fact that I qualified for free lunch, and the lack of material goods didn't faze me. However, it pained me to hold my mother's calloused hands after a long day of work at the nursing home and to see bags under my father's eyes as he headed off to work the night shift at a grocery store.

My parents would say, "Focus on your education so you can have the opportunities we didn't have," which was exactly what I did. Over time, I became quieter as I worried that if I didn't get it right the first time, I would break the "Model Minority" image of being perfect. Ms. Velasquez's comment started ringing in my ears.

Tired of not living at my full potential, I figured that a new high school would be the solution and fortunately, I was accepted to the **achieve** Program at Holy Names. I vowed to myself that I would do everything that I've always wanted to do. In freshman year, I joined Student Council and gave a speech in front of my peers. I became a school Ambassador, and even joined the swim team.

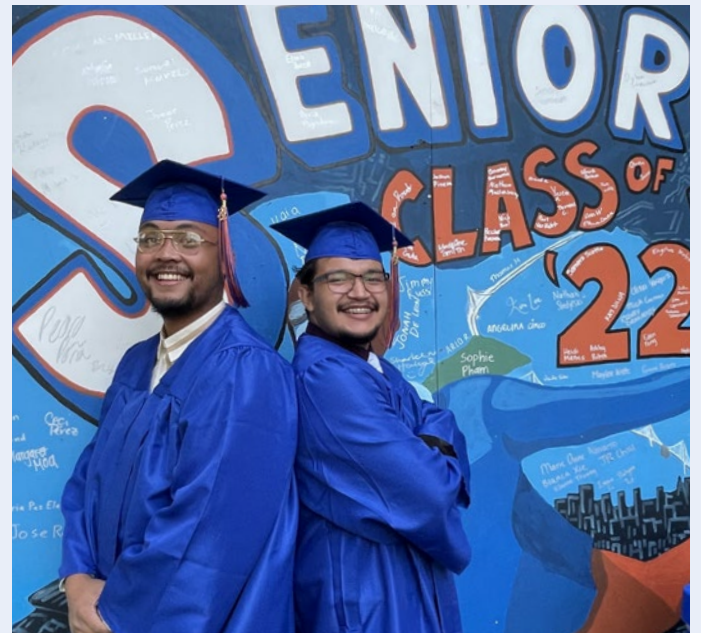
Besides my inner drive, I also felt inspired by my environment. Seeing my older **achieve** sisters be leaders, I strived to be just like them. The **achieve** Program itself encouraged me to try my best in everything I did and to step out of my comfort zone. I felt there was an emphasis on doing things not just for our resumes, but for personal development. With each volunteer shift, cultural event, and internship, I learned the importance of human connection, art, and life-long learning.



When it came time to start thinking about college, I felt an immense amount of pressure. It seemed that my whole life had come to this moment so I couldn't let my parents, family or Tibetan people down. The Chinese government tried to erase my people and culture. My dad, at the age of nineteen, risked his life as he trekked across the Himalayas in search of human rights. My mom, born into exile as a stateless refugee like me, worked day and night to get where she is today. So, I wasn't going to give up easily.

When I was accepted Early Decision to Columbia University, I realized that the trajectory of my life, my parents' lives, and my future family's life had changed. I was especially touched by messages from younger Tibetans who expressed their excitement about seeing representation in elite educational institutions.

I have made much progress since my shy middle school years. Now, I not only advocate for myself, I also advocate for those whose voices are suppressed in Tibet and elsewhere. I know that it isn't enough to quietly sit in the back of class. I have the privilege of freely having my voice heard, and I'm determined to use it to bring about change.



**TOP LEFT** 2022 Gerson Bakar Achievement Award recipients: Mia Bautista Bernal, HNHS; Daniela Rodriguez, HNHS

**BOTTOM LEFT** Recipients of the Jacob Valdiviezo Scholarship: Christian Ramirez, ARHS; Michael Lech Scholarship: Jamm Magaling, ARHS; Tyrone McGraw Scholarship: Max Lara, ARHS

**ABOVE** SJND Seniors Aiden Montesinos, Lorenzo Magwilli

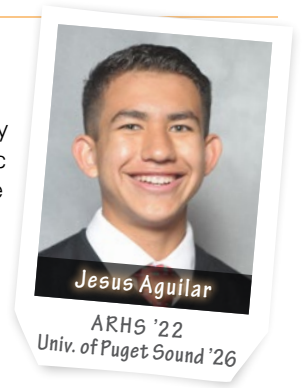




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## THE LONG, WINDING ROAD



Attending an all-boys Catholic school was not part of my plan. I wanted to follow my middle school friends to public high school, but my single mom believed that it would be better for me to attend a private school, which she could never afford. When we found the **achieve** Program, I did not think I had a chance. Upon receiving my acceptance, my mom was proud, but I cried on the inside, realizing I had to find new friends. Little did I know that being in **achieve** would be one of the best things to ever happen to me.

I have always struggled with meeting new people. The introductions, the forced small talk, and the awkward silences terrify me, so I was dreading high school. Fortunately, during **achieve**'s Summer Program, I had the opportunity to bond with my **achieve** brothers. We spent a month together reading books and attending field trips to places like the De Young Museum and Sutro Tower. I developed close relationships and was more confident facing my first week at Riordan.

**achieve** requires students to participate in at least one extracurricular activity. I decided that cross-country best suited me, believing that I was a decent runner. I was blindsided by how exhausted I felt after the first practice and mad because I thought I should have been the best out there. Soon I started looking forward to practice, viewing it as a competition to outdo myself and build close relationships with teammates. Although freshman year was rough, I persisted through injuries and our cross-country team made it to State. **achieve** made this possible by pushing me out of my comfort zone.

I have always appreciated theater, but did not have the opportunity or the funds to attend productions. **achieve** changed all that as I attended many enjoyable shows at the SF Playhouse, and seeing *Hamilton* my freshman year was magical. Prior to the musical, we attended a large party at City Hall. I felt like an adult walking around, talking to friends and well-dressed strangers, and eating good food. I never thought that someone like me could experience being served free food and beverages at City Hall. This experience made me feel like an important person and built my self-confidence.

**achieve** provided me with the chance to be of service to others. Community service was new to me as I never considered how important it was to give back. Volunteering at the San Francisco Campus for Jewish Living made me realize how much people appreciate help. I most enjoyed my work at the gift shop and cafe where I interacted with residents and visitors. Along with the work experience, I had the opportunity to talk to residents and bond with them over similar interests. I am grateful to have had this experience thanks to **achieve**, and plan on continuing to give back to my community.

During senior year, I worried about college and that I would be in so much debt due to the cost of attendance. **achieve** calmed my fears and helped me throughout the college process, researching colleges that were a good fit for me. From **achieve**, I learned about POSSE, a leadership program that covers the full cost of college tuition. With help from **achieve**, I applied to the program, and after multiple interviews, I received news of my POSSE acceptance to my first choice college, University of Puget Sound. I will always be grateful to **achieve** for making my college dreams come true.

Without **achieve**, I would likely not have become a great runner, a hard worker, and a future college student with a fabulous scholarship. While it was a long, winding road leading to the end of my time in high school, it was truly life-changing. I know there lies another road ahead, but **achieve** has done more than enough to prepare me for this new adventure. 🍷



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