

# achieve

*...opening a world of possibilities*

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

My mother, an African American-Filipino, migrated to the States before my birth in search of a better life. Here she met and married my African American father. When I was two, my parents divorced, and a bitter, tension-filled, six year-long custody battle began. My father would use lies against my mother in court to gain custody, trying to get her incarcerated for domestic abuse. Fortunately, he lost the case as his lies were exposed. Sadly, this resulted in me living in a single parent household with little to no child support, igniting in me a sense of justice that I hope to use for others.

At birth I was diagnosed with Sickle Cell Disease and later developed serious asthma. As a baby I was put on medications, and in adolescence had to learn how to pace myself, stay hydrated, take my pills and inhaler daily, and memorize every change in my prescriptions. Despite being on medications, I still experienced pain crises, landing me in the hospital. Because of my chronic conditions, I could not participate in competitive sports. However, when I found myself in the hospital or when I felt discouraged, I always told myself; "Sickle Cell is only a setback, not my shackle." I choose to see these times as a test of my will to get up and keep moving forward.

One of my greatest accomplishments is my musical growth. In the fourth grade I met a professional pianist who played Für Elise for a group of students, inspiring me to learn piano. Throughout middle school, I practiced playing music on a virtual piano website, listened to a classical piano playlist, and learned piano basics on a small keyboard my mom bought me. I joined the band as soon as I got to St. Joseph's, learned to read music, and am now proudly a part of the Honors Band.

Without **achieve's** financial support, all this would not have been possible. I would not have been able to focus on my studies or musical growth if I had to worry about rent and my sickle cell. **achieve** also taught me many skills including time management, using a planner, and asking for help. I learned how to produce

professional emails, write a resume, and how to behave in a work environment. The greatest support of all was providing me with the **achieve** family, supporting me through thick and thin and becoming lifelong friends.

I have many great memories over the past four years. My first internship with JFCS paired me with a judge who taught me what it takes to become a judge, and the responsibility of passing judgment, inspiring me to follow in her footsteps. Another great experience has been dressing up to attend performances at the San Francisco Playhouse, where we witnessed professional actors on stage and had the opportunity to speak with them. I realize that most teens do not have this privilege, considering the cost of tickets, and I am deeply grateful for this rare opportunity.

Perhaps my greatest **achieve** highlight is the deep relationship I have forged with my **achieve** family. We could all relate to each other as we went through similar experiences in our high school journey. I have worked with some of my **achieve** brothers during internships, like at the Exploratorium in the High School Explainer Program. Cultural events were times of bonding, as I would often share my snacks with peers who were seated next to me. I watched those before me graduate and others rise as **achievers** of the next generation. Whenever it was time to say goodbye to past **achieve** seniors, I felt this great sense of pride. Pride in my peers for the skills they had developed, challenges they had overcome, and the future they desire to move toward.

I could not be prouder to be an **achieve** student. The lifelong friendships and the life skills I learned were because of **achieve**. As I graduate and say goodbye to my **achieve** family, I am excited to start college. Currently, I plan to eventually study law and use the professional skills I gained to become a valuable asset to a law firm. The future is nigh and I have plenty of work to do, but I am forever grateful for **achieve** "opening up a world of possibilities..."



CLASS OF 2024 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES			*Students will be attending
Albion College	Davidson College*	Lehigh University	Southwestern University
Allegheny College	Emory University*	Loyola U Chicago	Swarthmore College
Berea College*	Gettysburg College	Macalester College*	Syracuse University
Beloit College*	Hope College*	Oberlin College	University of Puget Sound*
Boston College	Juniata College	Reed College	University of Rochester*
Case Western Reserve University	Kenyon College	Rhodes College*	University of St. Thomas*
College of the Holy Cross	Knox College	St. Olaf College*	Valparaiso University
Dartmouth College*	Lawrence University	Smith College*	Whitman College

## HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Although I was born in America, the blood of the Nigerian tribes Igbo and Ika flows through my veins. Nigerian values of strength, determination, dedication, and perseverance have guided the decisions I have made and who I am as a person.

Being raised in a Nigerian household was not easy. There were high expectations of me, but these expectations were not always put on me by others. A saying in Nigeria, "Naija no dey carry last," means that we must always be the best version of ourselves. It is in our DNA.

Being Nigerian also means we are inherently outspoken. At my school, I serve as ASB President, advocating on behalf of my peers. I always speak up about things that I believe are unjust, whether it is simply that my cousin picked three cards in UNO instead of four or to protest political corruption in Nigeria and inequities in America. This love for advocating and helping others has been amplified because of the **achieve** Program.

As an **achieve** scholar, I have been given the opportunity to pursue those interests through internships, the abundant number of cultural events, and the year-long volunteering in our local community. Ever since I could walk, medicine has been a passion of mine. At about age three, I would walk around the house with a stethoscope, attempting to check my family's "temperatures." I want to break



down barriers and join other Black women working in medicine. As an ongoing dream of mine, I want to create a clinic for those who cannot afford insurance for check-ups and basic procedures. Through the **achieve** Program, I was able to immerse myself in the medical world through my internship with CHORI. I am constantly given a stage on which to blossom.

Being introduced to the **achieve** Program, I was also introduced to the idea of going outside my comfort zone. However, being Nigerian, sometimes you believe that failure is never an option, which may occur when you go out of your comfort zone. This contradicts the **achieve** Program's philosophy of trying new things and opening your horizon. Their constant encouragement to push me, not just academically, but socially, allowed my true confidence to shine.

Just a few years ago, I was afraid of public speaking. Just speaking in front of a 10-person audience felt like the end of the world. But once again, because **achieve** pushed us to not only write and present speeches but also to socialize in professional settings through internships and informal settings through cultural events, I have truly evolved. Through those experiences and with this newfound confidence, I have taken many leadership positions and joined clubs to amplify my once shy and hesitant voice. I want to be a role model for others and follow my passion for advocating for topics I believe in.

**achieve** has allowed me to come out of my shell and become the person who truly portrays the characteristics of a Nigerian. I have studied hard in school and want to be a doctor. Being an **achieve** scholar, I have become the values I have always been taught to be. Because of the **achieve** Program, I have become determined, dedicated, and perseverant.

## OVERCOMING MY SHYNESS

I am a proud **achieve** scholar from a traditional Filipino immigrant family. My parents moved to America for better opportunities. Despite financial struggles, they discovered **achieve**, a program that transformed my sister's life. My sister inspired me to interview for **achieve** as an eighth grader. I was nervous; they were looking for leaders and I was unsure if my timid personality made me a good fit. Yet I was determined to overcome my shyness and step out of my isolation.

Because of **achieve**, I learned to interact with students from various backgrounds. During **achieve**'s College Tour, we were encouraged to step out of our comfort zone by engaging with students from different schools and were challenged to sit with someone of the opposite gender or another school during group activities. These interactions helped me meet new people and create meaningful relationships as we bonded over similar interests.

I have grown academically during high school. With **achieve**'s high expectations, and motivated by my parents' hard work to support my education, I wanted to excel in my studies so I could attend college. **achieve** helped me improve my work by providing study halls and tutoring. They also taught me to advocate for myself whenever I needed help. As a result, I improved significantly, transitioning from a



student with a low GPA in middle school to one with above-average grades in high school.

**achieve** provided me with summer internships. These opportunities, coupled with **achieve**'s Job-Prep Workshops, taught me the importance of professionalism and communication, skills that will undoubtedly aid me in the future. I gained communication skills by my interactions with new people and learned how to act in a professional manner. I also discovered the strength to speak up, engage in discussions, and take on leadership roles I never thought possible.

**achieve** also encouraged me to explore new activities, leading me to discover a passion for dance. Growing up, I never expected that I could become a dancer. Being shy, I was afraid to move my body for fear of embarrassing myself in front of others. However, I enrolled in my school's Dance Ensemble, which helped me learn to step beyond myself and perform willingly in front of others. I performed a Hula dance at **achieve**'s Christmas Holiday Party with my **achieve** sister, Lindsay. Embracing **achieve**'s encouragement of us to step out of our comfort zone, I showcased my love for dance in front of a crowd of over a hundred people! I am proud to say that moment was a highlight of my **achieve** journey.

I am immensely grateful to **achieve** for instilling in me crucial professional skills and a growth mindset. I learned the importance of time management, advocacy, and community. **achieve** has embraced me as part of their family, providing a supportive environment where I felt valued. My mentors have guided me towards paths I never imagined. Once a shy girl with average grades, I have transformed into a high-achieving scholar, eagerly anticipating my next chapter at St. Olaf College this fall.

# GAINING CONFIDENCE

I am the grateful son of Guatemalan immigrants. My parents separated when I was 7, but with my mom's support and help from my older sister I thrived. During the Pandemic, my mom lost her job as a dishwasher at the Fairmont, and we became vendors at the Berryessa Flea Market, working every weekend under the hot sun just to earn barely enough money to survive. Growing up in the Bayview, I have witnessed ugliness, whether it be drunken rage, violence, or reckless driving. But I try to see the beauty. Walking to the local library, I witness joyful barbecues on the sidewalk and friendly people congregating around lowriders.

I was always extremely shy and grew up too afraid to speak. **achieve** helped me overcome my shyness by requiring me to join extracurriculars, sit in the front of class, and always speak my mind. I joined the school newspaper, which helped me to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. Reaching out and conducting interviews terrified me. Gradually, I became more and more confident, to the point where if I had no response to my emails, I just showed up to conduct interviews. Being on the wrestling team brought out the competitiveness in me, also further boosting my confidence.

My greatest accomplishment these past four years is getting out of my comfort zone by involving myself in school activities. Aside from my community service and my weekend job at the Exploratorium, I am the News Editor for the school newspaper and the president of the Auto Shop Club. I also befriended my school's custodians. On many late afternoons I would exit the newspaper production room and see Raul, who, when we first met, expressed gratitude and relief that I responded to his greeting in Spanish. Since then, we always conversed. Eventually, I interviewed him for a newspaper story, with the goal of acknowledging the people who diligently and thanklessly cleaned up day after day. I received a national award for this story, but more importantly, I gained invaluable insight into my future as a Latino.

**achieve** has helped me in several ways. Academically, I learned to keep a planner to better track my assignments. Personally, **achieve**

pushed me out of my shell. At holiday parties we sat with peers from different schools and adults we had never met, encouraging conversations. Internships also helped me overcome my shyness. At my first in-person internship at BRIDGE Housing, I felt anxious about talking with adults. Luckily, I found comfort in my **achieve** siblings alongside me, despite them being strangers beforehand. My internship as an Explainer at the Exploratorium last summer helped me open up, making me comfortable talking to strangers and committed to giving them the best possible experience. During COVID, **achieve** was a lifesaver for my family, providing grocery cards that made meals for my mom, sister, and me possible.

My best memories have been of the friendships I have built because of **achieve**. Through a myriad of meetings and events, I formed a brotherly bond with my Riordan brothers and siblings from other schools. Through the Exploratorium, I built bonds with a wide range of people who lived and saw life completely different from me. I treasure these new insights and value these friendships. These bonds would not have been as strong or maybe even possible had it not been for **achieve**. My most impactful **achieve** memory is the College Tour. Even though I was in Minnesota, far from my family, I had my **achieve** family. Though I started the trip shy, I left wishing it had lasted a little longer.

As I look forward to college, I know that I will present myself confidently and proudly as an outgoing Guatemalan who got where he was because of the kindness and generosity of **achieve**. Because I have received such kindness, I will repay it. Whichever career path I choose, I will ensure that it serves good. Through my example, I will show my cousins that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to and I will create better circumstances for my mom. Through unconditional kindness I will make her and my family proud.



## Congratulations

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Sophie Ramirez

*Special Achievement Award:*  
Mayari Garcia-Recinos,  
Gabriela Alvarado Guzmán

*Tyrone McGraw Scholarship:*  
Precious Offu

*Jacob Valdiviezo Scholarship:*  
Araceli Ulloa-Soto

### BOTTOM LEFT ARHS 2024 AWARD RECIPIENT

*Michael Lech Scholarship:* Kyle Huang

### BOTTOM RIGHT SJND 2024 AWARD RECIPIENTS

*Gerson Bakar Achievement Award:*  
Maximiliano Beas, Jessie Cerna-Rivera



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## CULTURAL ADAPTABILITY



I was raised by my paternal grandparents in a small Chinese village while my parents worked in America. When I was seven, we moved to the US to live with my maternal grandparents. I only spoke Mandarin and Zhongshan, but soon learned Cantonese, the main language spoken in my new home. While growing up both in China and here, I had many household responsibilities like cleaning, cooking, and other chores. My diverse cultural experiences have shaped my unique identity and given me a distinctive perspective on life.

Adapting to a new culture was a major challenge. I had to adjust to American school lunches, thinking the string cheese was white sausage. Not knowing how to speak English created a language barrier for me. At my first school, no one spoke Chinese including the teacher, making it extremely difficult to learn and make friends. I was also bullied by some classmates. Life in America started rough but that changed when I transferred to a new school, where my teacher and classmates spoke Cantonese. That was the turning point where I began to adjust to my new culture.

My greatest accomplishment in high school is being a section leader in the school band. I have played flute since fourth grade and am now in my ninth year playing. In high school, during freshman year on Zoom, I gained a solid understanding of music theory due to reduced rehearsal time. In sophomore year I decided to learn to play the piccolo. I was the only piccolo player and the piccolo's high pitches pushed me to work harder than before because my mistakes would stand out. I got promoted to section leader junior year. My role as the flute section leader was to lead sectionals, help individuals, and make sure that people in my section could play their part. Throughout high school, I have had many solos and I have made significant improvement.

Each year, **achieve** has facilitated my personal, academic and professional growth. **achieve** pushed me out of my comfort zone, notably improving my public speaking during my presentations at the **achieve** Family Meetings. Academically, I was encouraged to explore new classes like computer science, a field I had never considered before but found surprisingly enjoyable. Professionally, **achieve** provided valuable real-life work experiences through internships, helping me discover my preferences, such as realizing that I do not enjoy sitting in front of a computer all day.

Being in **achieve** has given me wonderful memories like the annual holiday parties, where everyone in **achieve** dresses up for the occasion. We hear from an inspiring guest speaker, have great food, watch student talent shows, and my favorite part of the party, the trivia competition. Although my table has never won, each time it has been a blast. Other memories are of the cultural events. If not for **achieve**, I would have never gone to a play. Going to the **achieve** office for college preparation was a valuable time spent with **achieve** peers, working on college research and applications while creating unforgettable memories during breaks and lunches.

My highlight of being in the **achieve** Program was the College Tour. It was my first-time visiting colleges and traveling with a school group. When we first arrived in Minnesota, I was unprepared for what I was about to see. I could not take my eyes away from the colorful leaves everywhere. I experienced a taste of life on a college campus and I loved it. Every day on the trip was a surprise. At first it was awkward, but as the tour was closing everyone had become really good friends.

In the fall, I will be attending the University of Rochester to study mechanical engineering. I plan to leverage the cultural adaptability gained from my experiences of moving from China to America to help me adjust to living on the East Coast. I will apply my leadership skills from band to collaborative projects and community involvement. The **achieve** Program has played a critical role in my growth, providing exposure to public speaking and real-world work experiences. I will carry forward a passion for continuous improvement, particularly in music, and cherish the importance of relationships and shared experiences from **achieve**.



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