



...opening a world of possibilities

MAKING MY OWN WAY

I am the oldest of three children born to immigrant parents from El Salvador. Both of my parents came to this country as young adults, leaving behind their families. We are very proud of our heritage, and my mom loves cooking traditional Salvadoran food while we listen to Latin music. I've always felt a strong connection with her—she was all I had when I was younger, since my dad worked multiple jobs and was hardly ever home.

Growing up with my younger siblings has taught me to enjoy the little things in life, value patience, live in the moment, and never take things for granted. They are my motivation. I want to lead by example so they'll believe in their dreams. In addition to being a big brother, I'm also an entrepreneur. I've been cutting hair for three years and have had hundreds of people sit in my chair. It's a passion of mine. I get to meet new people and boost their confidence with something as simple as a haircut.

Some of the challenges I've faced include a language barrier, financial hardship, and not always feeling like I belonged. I didn't speak any English when I started school, and I had to learn quickly. My parents couldn't speak English, so I became the family translator. That was a big responsibility and often stressful. I remember sharing a tiny room in someone else's house with my parents and newborn brother. Later, we moved to a place where we still shared one room, but it was slightly bigger. Eventually, I moved into the garage, which became my very first room of my own.

Another challenge was attending a private middle school on scholarship. Most of the students were white and came from wealthy families. I often felt out of place because I couldn't relate to many of them.

One of my proudest accomplishments is being selected for the Bay Area Posse Program, which provides full-tuition college

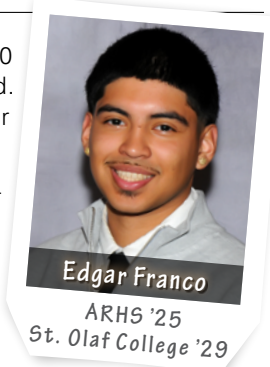
scholarships. Out of more than 1,000 local applicants, only 40 were selected. I'm honored to be a Posse Scholar for St. Olaf College in Minnesota.

achieve has laid the foundation for so much of my growth. Through internships, I explored careers and learned valuable skills like writing professional emails, being punctual, and dressing appropriately. **achieve** encouraged me to take AP classes and helped me stay organized with my planner and study plans. More than anything, **achieve** has helped me grow personally. Through community service, I learned the value of giving back. I've also developed social skills like public speaking, making conversation, and being a leader.

I've had many unforgettable experiences with **achieve**. Freshman orientation stands out—it was when I first met my peers and began forming a brotherhood. I've also loved volunteering at the San Francisco Campus for Jewish Living. Giving just a bit of my time had a big impact on people in need. The College Tour was another favorite experience. It was my first time traveling out of state, and I even visited the college I'll now attend.

The highlight of my **achieve** experience was my internship at Bridge Housing, a nonprofit that provides affordable housing. It was my first time working in a professional setting, and I was especially interested in finance, understanding client needs, and community service.

As I prepare to attend St. Olaf, I plan to major in Economics, explore clubs on campus, and continue my barbering business—there's even a barbershop there. I will continue to explore outside my comfort zone. I'll forever be grateful to the **achieve** Program for helping me become a stronger student, a confident individual, and someone who is passionate about giving back.



CLASS OF 2025 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

Albion College	Centre College	Kenyon College	Reed College	Trinity University
Allegheny College	Clark University	Knox College	Rhodes College	University of Puget Sound
Austin College	Emory & Henry University	Lawrence University	Rochester Institute of Technology	University of Richmond
Berea College	Gettysburg College	Lehigh University	St. Catherine University	University of Rochester
Beloit College	Gustavus Adolphus College	Loyola University, Chicago	St. Olaf College	University of St. Thomas
Boston College	Hope College	Macalester College	Stetson University	Valparaiso University
Bucknell University	Juniata College	McDaniel College	Syracuse University	Whitman College

BECOMING EZRO

Now that my senior year is coming to an end, I've been thinking a lot about how far I've come—and how much of that is thanks to **achieve**.

When I first joined **achieve** and started high school, I was terrified. I already felt like I didn't fit in. I was one of the very few trans kids at my school, with short hair and a sense that I stood out in all the wrong ways. My family couldn't have afforded the school without **achieve**'s support, so I also felt out of place financially—like a poor kid in a sea of wealth. And since I didn't align with any religion, attending a Catholic school added another layer of feeling like I didn't belong. Things only got harder when my parents went through a tough divorce midway through high school—something we're still dealing with today.



Even with all of that, **achieve** was one of the things that helped me bloom. I gained confidence. I no longer see myself as the quiet, shy boy I once was. I take pride in my art, my education, and in the person I've become.

achieve helped me get there by encouraging me to get involved—in community service, cultural events, and extracurriculars. I learned how to introduce myself, how to hold a

conversation, and how to describe myself as bubbly instead of shy. I discovered how to use a planner to keep track of my work, and how to study in a way that actually helped me succeed. Finals used to feel like the end of the world, until someone handed me a study schedule—and I realized I could do it.

Professionally, **achieve** pushed me to pursue opportunities I would've been too nervous to try. Applying for internships was scary—until I realized I wasn't alone. I had a community going through it with me. Now, things like résumés, interviews, and email etiquette feel like second nature.

Some of my favorite memories come from **achieve**. At the San Francisco Campus for Jewish Living, I volunteered with a memory care resident who slowly began to forget everything—even me. But on our last visit, she held my hand and said, "I don't remember your name, but I know I love you." That moment taught me that being present and kind can leave a lasting impression, even when memories fade.

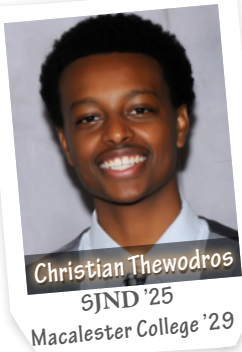
Another special memory was the goodbye party at the end of my internship at SFMOMA. My coworkers made me feel seen and appreciated. I presented my final project, shared laughs, and received a stuffed bunny I'd been admiring all summer. That simple act of kindness meant everything.

achieve taught me to ask for help, to push myself, and to believe that I don't have to be the best—I just have to be myself. I'm ready for what's next. I'm excited to see where my creativity, my voice, and my courage take me.

FROM STRUGGLE TO STRENGTH

I am the oldest of three children in my Ethiopian-American family. My parents and extended family were born and raised in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In 2007, they immigrated to the U.S. while my mom was pregnant with me, hoping to give their children greater opportunities. I attend the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church, where I serve as a deacon—reflecting my deep connection to both my heritage and my faith. Outside of church, I'm a three-sport athlete and play percussion in my school's band.

I've faced many challenges that have shaped me. In sophomore year, I struggled with procrastination. During an **achieve** check-in, Mr. Rivera pointed out how missing assignments were hurting my grades. His disappointment motivated me to take accountability and build better habits. I also struggled with peer pressure, doing things just to gain attention—even when it got me in trouble. Eventually, I realized being popular wasn't worth the consequences, and I began focusing on staying true to myself.



One of my greatest accomplishments was turning a tough academic moment into a success. I earned a C in AP U.S.

History but didn't let that define my potential. I worked hard and earned a 4 on the AP exam. That taught me resilience and the value of consistent effort and staying focused on my goals.

achieve has helped me grow in every way. Presenting at family meetings helped me overcome stage fright and improve my public speaking. The program encouraged me to challenge myself academically and stay organized using my planner. Professionally, **achieve** introduced me to internships and volunteer opportunities where I learned workplace etiquette, communication, and the importance of giving back.

Some of my favorite **achieve** memories include volunteering at the Saint Vincent de Paul Society with friends from Saint Joe's and Holy Names. I also loved the UC Berkeley BUDS internship—sharing laughs on BART rides home, narrowing down my interests, and considering majors like Data Science. The highlight of all was the College Tour. Exploring campuses in Minnesota helped me envision my future, but what made it truly special was bonding with my **achieve** siblings.

Reflecting on the past four years, I know how much I've grown—not just academically, but as someone who now faces challenges head-on. As I prepare for college, I'll carry with me everything **achieve** taught me, especially the importance of integrity and paying it forward.

CONFIDENCE FORGED

Four years ago, as I waited in the Zoom lobby for my **achieve** interview. I was anxious about how I would answer the questions and represent myself fully. English, not being my first language, made me feel like every conversation was a test, and I struggled to translate my thoughts perfectly. Now, I sit in the waiting room for my college interviews already knowing who I am and how I will express myself.

When my family immigrated to America in 2014, my parents' sacrifices as street vendors selling various noodle soups for a living instilled in me the value of hard work and education. I was thrilled when I read my acceptance letter to Holy Names as an **achieve** scholar—it felt like I was taking the first step toward honoring my parents' dream.

During freshman orientation, I got a glimpse of what **achieve** would offer me as I tasted a burrito for the first time and completed my first-ever hike on Angel Island. Surprisingly, I enjoyed these experiences and felt a sense of pride at the end of the day, proving that growth begins where comfort ends. Returning from COVID schooling and transitioning into freshman year was tough—I struggled to stay organized and adjust to my new school. But **achieve**'s emphasis on using a planner taught me how to manage my time and split up tasks, showing me that progress happens every day, and the best way to succeed is to prepare.

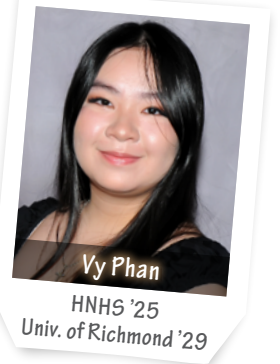
Each year, **achieve** students look forward to the Christmas party—not just for the food, but also for the trivia game. During my

sophomore year, my table didn't expect to win, since we were underclassmen. We had trouble agreeing on answers and working as a team. But I realized how diverse our knowledge was, and that collaboration and communication were key. We won the trivia because we listened to one another.

The many lessons I've learned from **achieve** prepared me for internships at KP Launch and the Summer Student Research Program (SSRP). At KP Launch, I was thrown into the fast-paced hospital setting—shadowing pharmacists, delivering medications, and juggling tasks under pressure. I nearly panicked, but my planner and adaptability helped me stay calm and focused.

At SSRP, I researched how antibodies verify induced pluripotent stem cells. Some results contradicted expectations, which was frustrating. But this taught me how important it is to question assumptions and protect patients from misinformation. These experiences—and the confidence I built presenting at **achieve**'s family meetings—helped me deliver a flash talk at the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine Conference.

As I prepare to graduate, I can see how much I've grown as a leader and individual. What began as anxiety in a Zoom lobby has transformed into confidence and independence. I'm ready to step into a new chapter—pursuing medicine and fulfilling my dream of becoming a pharmacist.



Congratulations!

TOP

HNHS 2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS

- Vy Phan
(Gerson Bakar Achievement Award)
- Padme Monzon
(Special Achievement Award)
- Sofia Ramos
(Gerson Bakar Achievement Award)
- Belinda Bautista Pablo
(Michael Lech Scholarship)
- Yoli Pajarito
(Special Achievement Award)



BOTTOM LEFT

MHSB 2025 RECIPIENT

- Ezro Barrera
(Michael Lech Scholarship)

BOTTOM CENTER

SJND 2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS

- Kevin Nguyen
(Gerson Bakar Achievement Award)
- Eduardo Cornejo
(Tyrone McGraw Scholarship)

BOTTOM RIGHT

ARHS 2025 AWARD RECIPIENT

- Christopher Dominguez
(Jacob Valdiviezo Scholarship)



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* **achieve** alumni

PAYING IT FORWARD



For most of my life, I spent summers in Guatemala with my grandparents, who live in a small village two and a half hours south of Huehuetenango. Villagers often visit my grandmother when they're sick because she's knowledgeable about herbal medicine and Mayan home remedies. Access to medical technology is not available in our village, and traveling to the nearest hospital is very difficult. These visits planted the early seeds of my passion for medicine and community care.

Unable to read English, my Guatemalan parents couldn't register my younger siblings for school, so I had to complete their forms. In the "What is your highest level of education?" section, I searched for an option lower than "Some High School," but there wasn't one. I long for an environment where I am accepted as Belinda—a "morenita," the daughter of Guatemalan parents with "some grade school" education, who do not speak English, who struggle financially, and whose daughter is the first in the family to attend high school and now college.

Community service has always been a significant part of my life. From speaking with volunteers at the community food bank while receiving my own nutritious packages, to the after-school program volunteers who helped me with my homework, and even the volunteer supervisors at block parties, service has always meant support, safety, and connection.

These experiences reminded me that I had others to depend on—people to talk to when I needed help. One conversation with a community volunteer made me feel secure and heard, especially since I didn't always receive that attention at home as my younger brothers needed it more than I did. As I grew older, I became determined to pay that kindness forward and find ways to be a dependable source of help for others in my community.

achieve introduced me to opportunities to "pay it forward" by assigning me shifts at local nonprofit organizations. Volunteering with groups that focus on food awareness and food insecurity ignited my passion for community health and deepened my interest in medicine and outreach. After volunteering at the Berkeley Free Clinic, I discovered that medical care and support are needed more than I realized.

Since I have lived in Oakland all my life, I've always been surrounded by diversity. I grew up in multicultural communities and multilingual schools that included many races and ethnicities. My volunteer experiences at food banks and free clinics gave me a wide multicultural lens. They taught me that many people need to be served, and each one must be treated with respect for their individual culture and background. **achieve** gave me the tools and support to explore what I want to pursue. Its volunteer opportunities inspired me to deepen my involvement in the Oakland community, solidifying my passion for a career in nursing.

When I began researching colleges last summer, I looked for schools that aligned with my interests in biology, STEM research, and community health. I filtered for those offering strong financial aid, diverse study abroad programs, and a focus on medicine and equity. I continued my research by watching YouTube videos, using college guides, attending fairs, and registering for interviews. I wanted to find a place that not only matched my academic goals but also supported my identity and values.

Through **achieve**'s summer internships, I gained a better understanding of the work environments that suit me and those that don't. I learned the value of "work personas" and began strengthening my character—important steps in my personal and professional development.

Through my experiences, I've come to realize that one problem that must be addressed is community health and the creation of free, local health care centers. Being exposed to so many diverse communities has shown me the range of support people need. I want to study and gain the skills necessary to support efforts to establish equitable, universal health care—a critically important step toward creating a world where all people can thrive.



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