



...opening a world of possibilities

GROWING CONFIDENT AND INDEPENDENT

Both of my parents were born in Mexico and came to the United States in search of a better life. When I was four, they separated, and since then we've had very little contact with my dad. For the past twelve years, it has been my mom, my sister, my brother, and me.

We live in a small apartment in San Francisco's Ingleside District. My sister and brother share a room, and I sleep on the couch. My mom raised us on the Mexican food she grew up cooking, and over time I asked her to teach me. Cooking became one of my passions. My favorite dishes to make are shrimp ceviche and tinga, chicken simmered with chipotle peppers. Being in the kitchen with my mom is one of the ways I feel most connected to my family.

Growing up, I faced challenges both financially and socially. Although my dad provides some child support, it's not enough to cover our needs. My mom is unable to work because of an eye condition and is now legally blind. For the past two years, I've worked part-time to help support my family. It hasn't always been easy, but it has made me more responsible and independent.

Socially, I struggled with confidence. I often assumed friends were excluding me or didn't want me around. Through journaling and reflecting on my emotions, I learned to communicate more openly and built a strong, supportive group of friends.

One of my proudest accomplishments in high school has been developing my confidence and communication skills. When I first arrived at Archbishop Riordan High School, I was shy and hesitant to talk to new people. Through **achieve**, I learned to approach others with confidence and positivity. That's how

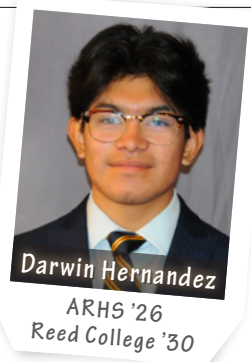
I met my two best friends. We talk every day, spend time together outside of school, and I know these friendships will last beyond high school.

achieve has supported me in countless ways. Because many students come from backgrounds similar to mine, it felt easier to connect and build friendships. The program also helped me grow professionally through internships aligned with my interest in science. Academically, **achieve** kept me organized, encouraged me to take rigorous classes, and provided resources my family couldn't afford.

Some of my favorite memories come from **achieve** experiences. The Junior College Tour was life-changing. I had never traveled to the East Coast, and visiting colleges helped me see myself attending school out of state. Spending those days together also helped me build friendships with students from other **achieve** schools. I also loved the **achieve** holiday parties: dressing up, watching performances, and celebrating together.

A major highlight was my internship at the Exploratorium. As a high school Explainer, I led demonstrations for visitors, which strengthened my communication skills and confidence. After the summer, I was rehired and have continued working there since my junior year. The job helps me support my family and has given me a strong sense of independence.

As I begin college, I'm grateful for the opportunities that helped me grow into a more confident and capable person. I look forward to living independently, staying organized, and making a positive impact on the people and communities I encounter.



CLASS OF 2026 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

*Partial list

Albion College	College of St. Benedict	Lewis & Clark College	Southwestern University
Allegheny College	Davidson College	McDaniel College	Trinity College
American University	DePauw University	Macalester College	Tulane University
Austin College	Emory & Henry University	Northeastern University (London)	University of Denver
Beloit College	Gettysburg College	Oberlin College	University of Puget Sound
Brandeis University	Goucher College	Pacific Lutheran University	University of Rochester
Carleton College	Hope College	Reed College	University of St. Thomas
Centre College	Juniata College	Rhodes College	Valparaiso University
Clark University	Lawrence University	St. Mary's College (IN)	Washington University, St. Louis
Colgate University	Lehigh University	St. Olaf College	Whitman College

SHAPED BY CHALLENGES

I was born in San Francisco to my African-American father and Polish-American mother. My mom passed away from cancer when I was only one year old. I live in the Ingleside District with my older brother and my father, who retired from law enforcement after my mom died so he could raise us. For the past two years, our family has relied mostly on my brother's income and my dad's Social Security benefits. He didn't work long enough to earn a pension, so money has been tight. Even with these struggles, our home is filled with love and peace, and we do our best to live meaningful lives together.

Challenges have shaped who I am. Learning to balance academics, **achieve** responsibilities, and my personal life taught me time management and accountability. Socially, I had to grow as well. Before **achieve**, I was quiet and not very outgoing. Speaking at Family Meetings and connecting with people at **achieve** events helped me build confidence and communication skills. Financially, things were also difficult. Attending concerts, movies, and sports games was rare. Without a family car, traveling was hard, and our home wasn't always a comfortable place to invite friends. Still, these experiences made me more resilient and grateful.

Over the past four years, I've achieved milestones I'm proud of. I earned a place on the Archbishop Riordan President's Honor Roll multiple times with a 4.0+ GPA. As a sophomore, I received the San Francisco Campus for Jewish

Living Volunteer Recognition Award. It meant a lot to know my efforts to provide companionship and support to residents made a difference.

achieve has helped me grow socially, academically, and professionally. I've become more outgoing and confident speaking with adults through presentations and internships. Academically, I challenged myself with courses outside my comfort zone, including AP English, Acting, Journalism, and Yoga, broadening both my skills and perspective. **achieve** internships introduced me to different career paths and gave me valuable professional experience. Most importantly, **achieve** pushed me to stay open to new opportunities.

Some of my favorite memories come from **achieve** experiences. A college tour to Massachusetts and Connecticut was especially meaningful because my mother grew up in Massachusetts. Visiting campuses helped me imagine my future and bond with my classmates. **achieve** cultural events also inspired me. Watching live theater motivated me to join my school's productions, where I performed in *Hello Dolly*, *They Promised Her the Moon*, and *Hadestown*. Without **achieve**, I might never have discovered my love for performing.

The most impactful experience was my internship at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Working in both office and museum settings gave me insight into how an art institution operates. I attended department meetings, visited private galleries, and viewed works by artists like Yayoi Kusama and Kara Walker. I also created a museum guide for younger visitors, including a scavenger hunt across the seven-level museum. That experience sparked a lasting passion for art and creativity.

This fall, I'll attend college and continue exploring the world around me. I hope to share my talents, support my community, and carry forward the **achieve** spirit of paying it forward.

STEPPING INTO LEADERSHIP

I am the only child of teenage parents, and I grew up moving between two households in Oakland. That experience shaped me in many ways. I learned how to adapt, how to be understanding, and how to stay grounded even when life felt constantly in motion.

My Salvadoran identity has always been a huge part of who I am. From eating pupusas at family gatherings to praying with relatives, my culture taught me resilience, love, and the importance of community. Soccer has also always been there for me. Whether it was competitive matches, serving as a team captain, or pickup games at the park, soccer has been more than a sport. It's how I express myself, connect with others, and stay focused. Because of these experiences, I've grown up valuing family, respect, consistency, and community.

There have been obstacles along the way. Being the only child of teenage parents came with pressure to succeed and not waste opportunities. Since my parents were never married, I moved between multi-generational households, adjusting to different expectations and environments. My extended family also carries trauma from the Salvadoran Civil War, which has shaped many of our lives. At times, things felt heavy. Soccer became my healthiest outlet; a place to release stress, stay disciplined, and focus on something positive when life felt overwhelming.

My greatest accomplishment in high school has been stepping into leadership. Becoming a team captain meant more than calling plays. It meant becoming someone others could trust on and off the field. Over time, I began taking on leadership roles in other spaces too, and I started seeing myself as someone people could rely on. Learning to lead with respect, empathy, and consistency has been one of the most meaningful parts of my high school journey.

Being part of **achieve** helped me grow in countless ways. As a first-generation student, **achieve** made me feel seen, supported, and understood. It provided structure and guidance through the college process when everything felt overwhelming. I built confidence in academic and professional settings and reflected on who I am, where I come from, and where I want to go. **achieve** also pushed me to dream bigger and believe I belong in spaces that once felt intimidating. Just as importantly, it connected me with peers who share similar backgrounds and ambitions, making me feel less alone.

Some of my favorite memories came from **achieve** experiences. The college tour helped me picture myself on a campus and imagine my future. Writing my personal statement allowed me to tell my story with honesty and pride. My internships sharpened my skills and taught me how to navigate professional environments.

Looking ahead, I hope to attend a college that values culture, community, and the outdoors. I plan to continue playing soccer and leading with heart while advocating for representation and inclusivity on campus. I'll stay connected to my Salvadoran roots as I explore new opportunities, and I want to give back through leadership, mentorship, and service. My family's sacrifices motivate me to keep pushing forward and make the most of every opportunity.



Julian Davis
ARHS '26
St. Olaf College '30



Miguel Ascencio-Zavala
SJND '26
Centre College '30

FINDING HER VOICE

If I could speak to the younger version of myself, she might not recognize the person I am today. Little Sianny Guzman moved through school quietly, unaware of her own potential. She could never have imagined the opportunities and growth that awaited her, or the confidence she always hoped to carry one day. I didn't realize it then, but those years were shaping who I would become.

I was raised by the Bolivian side of my family as the second oldest of four siblings by a single mother and my grandmother. I began my education in public school, so transitioning to an academically rigorous private school brought challenges I hadn't expected. I had always felt strong academically, until I realized my peers seemed to know more than I did. My confidence deflated as gaps in my learning surfaced, from grammar rules to basic math concepts.

Recently, a government class test asked us to identify a state by its abbreviation on a U.S. map. I had never learned geography, so I missed the question. After class, my teacher told me I was the only student who got it wrong. I left in tears; not because I failed, but because it brought back the feeling of being overwhelmed and out of place in ninth grade. Still, I didn't let that moment define me. It reminded me how far I'd come.

Some of those struggles began much earlier. In preschool, teachers often made me feel judged when I participated. A critical ballet teacher left me afraid of public expression: speaking, dancing, even asking for help. Those early experiences stayed with me, leaving me anxious in academic settings and hesitant to try new opportunities. So when I was accepted into **achieve** in ninth grade, it felt both intimidating and life-changing.

achieve became essential to my growth. Through the scholarship, I received financial support to attend Mercy High School,

but more importantly, I gained skills beyond the classroom. I learned to write professional emails, communicate confidently with adults, and advocate for myself. **achieve** supported me with essays and coursework, strengthening my academic foundation. Most importantly, it helped me confront my fears. For the first time, I spoke up in class, asked teachers for help, and presented without freezing. I began to trust that my voice mattered.

One of my most meaningful experiences was being accepted into UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland's Summer Student Research Program. There, I saw what a future in healthcare could look like. Through hands-on clinical experience and research exposure, my interest in medicine became a clear goal. For the first time, I could picture myself in a professional setting where my passion for helping others could become a lifelong career.

My academic progress is now one of my proudest achievements. I enrolled in advanced courses I once thought were beyond my reach, learned to manage my time, and maintained strong grades even during difficult moments. I earned a place on the Head of School's Honor Roll with a GPA above 4.0 and will attend college this fall to study neuroscience as I continue working toward a career in healthcare.

Little Sianny may not have believed in the opportunities ahead, but I carry her with me as a reminder of how far I've come. My journey has been shaped by perseverance, support, and growth. As I step into this next chapter, I do so with confidence, gratitude, and like **achieve**, a deep commitment to helping others succeed.



Sianny Guzman

MHSB '26
Trinity College '30



Congratulations!

TOP LEFT

ARHS 2026 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Julian Davis
(Tyrone McGraw Scholarship)

Daniel Reyes
(Michael Lech Scholarship)

TOP RIGHT

MHSB 2026 AWARD RECIPIENT

Sianny Guzman
(Gerson Bakar Achievement Award)

BOTTOM LEFT

SJND 2026 AWARD RECIPIENT

Johnny Mata
(Gerson Bakar Achievement Award)

BOTTOM RIGHT

HNHS 2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Heidi Mendez Mejia
(Jacob Valdiviezo Scholarship)

Angela Leon Alvarez
(Gerson Bakar Achievement Award)





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BUILDING CONFIDENCE



One of my favorite sayings is, "Heavy is the head that wears the crown," because it perfectly describes my inner struggles. I am my family's first: first child, first daughter, first granddaughter, and the first to show strong academic promise. When my family saw the trail of A's that graced my report cards, they never expected anything less. I have younger siblings and cousins that I'm expected to blaze the path for, and I'm deeply aware of my family's financial struggles and the unspoken hope that one day I will help change them.

Over time, their expectations became the standards I set for myself. My values of family and ambition grew stronger, but so did the weight of responsibility. Being my family's "pillar of hope" was exhausting at times, which is why **achieve** meant so much to me. It wasn't just support; it was a community that reminded me I didn't have to carry everything alone.

As I balanced academic pressure, family expectations, and personal goals, **achieve** became a place where I could grow beyond the classroom. Through summer internships, I discovered my confidence, my strengths, and ultimately, my passion.

My first internship was at UC Berkeley's Explorer Camp, working with children ages four to six. It was my first professional job and I absolutely adored the kids. I learned patience by listening to their imaginative stories, calming them when they were upset, and encouraging them when they felt unsure. That summer taught me how presence, creativity, and patience can make a meaningful difference.

My second internship was at UC Berkeley's Girls in Engineering camp for middle school girls. Engineering isn't my calling, but I went in with an open mind. I helped set up meals, supervised activities, and built strong connections with the girls. I learned efficiency, adaptability, and how to connect with all age groups, skills that will stay with me for life.

My most transformative experience was at UCSF's Summer Student Research Program. I shadowed a pediatric endocrinologist and led a research project studying adolescents taking weight-loss medications. I scheduled volunteer meetings, collected hospital data, attended medical lectures, and ultimately designed and presented my research poster.

I was nervous. I constantly questioned whether I was doing procedures correctly or writing "scientifically" enough. But **achieve** gave me the confidence to keep going, to trust myself and my abilities. Through clinical research and time with patients, my interest in medicine turned into a true calling.

achieve shaped more than my academic and career path. It helped me grow in service, sisterhood, and self-confidence. Over four years, I completed 160 hours of community service. What once felt like an obligation became an opportunity to give back. I began to see my community as something we all share, and something we are all responsible for caring for.

The sisterhood I found through **achieve** made high school unforgettable. From college tours and after-school meetings to internships and service projects, I built cherished memories with girls who shared my goals and values. Those friendships showed me the power of encouragement and belonging.

Since early adolescence, I struggled with severe acne that deeply affected my self-esteem. I avoided attention, hesitated to meet new people, and downplayed my achievements because I struggled with self-love. **achieve's** emphasis on public speaking terrified me. Standing in front of others and having them stare at my face felt overwhelming. But it was also transformative. After a few meetings, speaking became natural. I found my voice.

At the same time, I learned to accept myself. My acne didn't disappear, but my confidence grew. As I embraced who I was, I flourished academically and socially. I introduced myself to new people, volunteered to speak publicly, took on leadership roles, and became the role model I hoped to be for my siblings and cousins.

Today, I am preparing for a new journey: college. I plan to major in Molecular Biology, continue playing volleyball, and remain committed to service. My goal is to become an OB-GYN, empowering women and helping them feel confident in their bodies. The professionalism, public-speaking skills, and resourcefulness I developed these past four years will guide me through college, medical school, and beyond.

As I close the doors of high school, I do so as a young woman who is empathetic, ambitious, and confident in herself and her capabilities. I am deeply grateful to **achieve** for the education, experiences, and community that helped me become who I am today.



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