



## Join the Journey: Every Step Matters

### Remarks from Achieve Twin Cities President & CEO Danielle Grant

This has been a year of tremendous challenges, and also great new work and partnerships that strengthen and expand our services for young people as they create their own unique journeys.

First, we're thrilled to welcome Richfield Public Schools to the Achieve family. We are providing career and college readiness services at Richfield High School to help students explore and plan their next steps. Richfield is a community that values opportunity and collaboration, and we're so honored to partner with them to help more young people turn their goals into a plan for the future.

This year we also brought our Career & College Centers and Step Up teams together to create one united program that provides a more seamless experience for young people as they explore career pathways. In the process, we deepened our partnership with Minneapolis Public Schools Career and Technical Education – and we built new volunteer pipelines that doubled the number of volunteers engaging with students at our career exploration events. With our partners at the City of Minneapolis, we also redesigned Step Up to better meet our interns' needs as they prepare for careers — and our *employers'* needs as they build our next-generation workforce. The new Step Up Pro, led by Achieve,

now offers more advanced, competitive internships and greater professional development opportunities.

And we continued to strengthen our work this year with 192 dedicated Twin Cities companies, who provided volunteers, Step Up Pro internships and other generous support for students.

As everyone here knows, Operation Metro Surge deeply impacted our community this year. It was an incredibly scary and difficult time for everyone, including our staff and especially our young people.

Through these difficult times, our students persevered as they always do. Even when their lives were interrupted and getting to school was a struggle, they kept showing up and planning for their careers and college. Our team also doubled down to make sure students and families got the extra support they needed. And it worked.

These numbers help tell the story:

- First, our students stayed with us. 95% of our seniors kept working with their Achieve coordinators on career and college planning, and that's actually higher than the year before. In a year when just getting to school could be a struggle, that says a lot about their commitment and determination.
- Second, the support made a difference where it mattered most. Students of color and students from lower-income families who met with us most often applied to college at nearly the same rates as their white and more affluent classmates. For a community that has long faced gaps in college access, that is real progress, and it shows what's possible
- And third, students followed through on the FAFSA, which is one of the strongest signs that a student is serious about college. 64% of students in our partner schools completed the FAFSA, 15 points above the state average [of 49%]. Among seniors planning to go to college, 81% completed it.

As we can so clearly see, our students continued to believe in themselves and in their futures despite these many challenges.

Through their eyes, I saw how we could all move forward. They were the ones making decisions, pursuing opportunities, overcoming obstacles and imagining their futures. Our job was to help guide them on their journeys.

We know that more change is coming. Minneapolis Public Schools is undergoing school transformation, which will mean change for many of our students. St. Paul Public Schools is about to unveil a new strategic plan to move them into the future.

And most important of all, there is an election next month, one of the most consequential of our lifetimes. I urge everyone to get involved, and to deeply consider how you can stand up and speak up for a future we can all believe in.

Many things are outside our control, but what is within our control is how we show up. Whatever change comes, young people will always need relationships, guidance and opportunities.

Achieve will continue to hold strong to our mission, vision, and values, and to our belief in our community, our state, and a country that honors and upholds the principles of dignity and opportunity for every individual. We will keep standing with our students, our schools, and our district partners. And we will continue delivering the quality guidance and support our students count on, while finding new ways to deepen our impact and expand our reach.