

Higher Achievement is an intensive after school and summer academy program that caters to students in grades 5 through 8. Students meet with their Center Director, Assistant Center Director, Achievement Coaches, Mentors and Tutors three times a week from 4 to 8 o'clock in order to complete their homework, work on extracurricular activities, and learn lessons in topics ranging from math and literature to communications technology and kitchen sink science.

The program was founded in 1975 by Greg Gannon, a teacher at Gonzaga College High School who recognized the achievement gap between students of varied incomes in his neighborhood. The youth were living in the same neighborhood/granted access to the same schools, but were achieving with wildly different success rates. Higher Achievement conducted studies of out of school time and determined that students devoting their extracurricular time were able to achieve higher test scores and greater success rates in college.

Higher Achievement cultivates a sense of culture and community in order to better engage the students they work with. Ward 1 in particular, the site that DC Reads @ AU works with, encourages daily demonstrations of "CARE PLus 2" - Choices, Attitude, Respect, Excellence, Preparation, and Leadership. These values in combination with the structure of Higher Achievement allow scholars to work on their public speaking, critical thinking, and team building skills. The students and staff come together every day for dinner, electives, community meeting and gathering time, in addition to their smaller groups in study hall and mentoring session.

In addition to the program's emphasis on community, Higher Achievement places a high emphasis on scholar's accountability. Students are given the tools to create their success, are encouraged to ask for help and guidance whenever they need it, and are held accountable for their academic progress through homework and report card updates. If they are motivated to create their own success, scholars will be more successful in their high school years and future endeavors. Scholars are rewarded with Achieblings for their demonstration of positive qualities like CARE+2 which earn them rewards from the Achiebling store. Checks are earned by scholars who do not demonstrate CARE+2 and cause disruption in the classroom for example. The system of checks and balances encourages scholars to hold each other to high standards so that every scholar is able to succeed. Higher Achievement also promotes a strong sense of the importance of top high school placement, where in D.C. getting into the right high school determines the ease of resource availability, scholarships and college preparation. Eighth graders take lessons in placement test preparation and are mentored through the process of applications, essays, interviews by their volunteer mentors. On average, 95 percent of Higher Achievement scholars advance to top academic high schools in DC and 93 percent go on to college.

"I love the structure that Higher Achievement has; it really allows you to go in-depth with certain subjects and topics in your tutoring and mentoring sessions. In my study hall, Higher Achievement scholars are motivated by their peers, and they personally set expectations for themselves in order to be successful in their academic careers."

- George Fountain, Higher Achievement Tutor and Team Leader in 2012-2013