



**HIGHER  
ACHIEVEMENT**

## CONTACT

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# Agenda

- ▶ Overview of Higher Achievement in Richmond
- ▶ Overview of Research Design and Findings
- ▶ Research in Practice: in COVID-19 context
- ▶ Local Impressions
- ▶ Q&A

## Housekeeping

- ▶ Microphones muted, cameras optional
- ▶ Q&As: add your questions to the chat, or ask your question live during Q&A time.
- ▶ We will do our best to finish early.
- ▶ You will receive a link to the full report after this event.



# What is Higher Achievement?

Higher Achievement offers a rigorous, supportive, and fun afterschool program in the critical transition from 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades—with caring mentors, meals, college and career exposure, and academic enrichment—culminating in placement in competitive college preparatory high schools.





# What Problem Does Higher Achievement Solve? Achievement and Opportunity Gaps

- On average, black and Latino students are roughly **two to three years of learning behind** white students of the same age. (*McKinsey*)
- Only **35%** of African American fifth-graders with high math performance are enrolled in Algebra by eighth grade, compared with **more than 60%** of their high-performing white peers. (*Education Trust*)
- Increasing the graduation rate for African American students in Richmond to 90% would mean annual increases in state and local tax revenue of \$380,000 and **\$9.1 million in GDP**. (*Alliance for Educational Excellence*)



# Middle School is Critical, But Investment is Lacking.

## Brain Development in Early Adolescence

- Most substantial in Middle School, aside from infancy (*National Institute of Mental Health*)
- Wired for risk taking and peer approval (*Vassar College*)
- Self identity develops, apart from their family (*Chicago Consortium of School Research*)

## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Matters

- School attendance, behaviors, and course grades in 6th grade predict high school graduation (*Johns Hopkins University*)

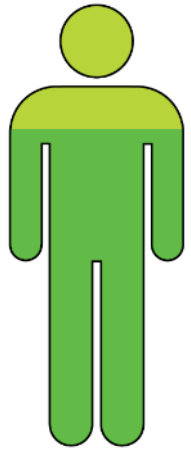
## And Yet...

- Highest rates of teacher turnover in middle grades (*UVA-Curry School*)
- Least government and philanthropic investment (*UVA – Curry School*)
- ... this is where **Higher Achievement** steps in

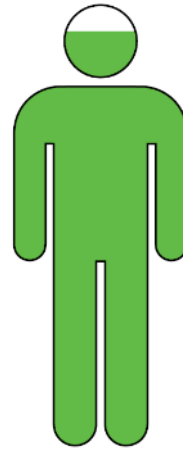


# Who Are Our Scholars?

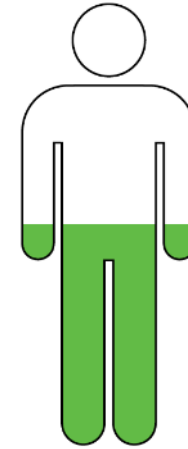
**1000 middle school scholars** in **13 schools**  
in Baltimore, DC, Prince George's County, Alexandria, and Richmond



Scholar population in Richmond is  
**77%** African American and  
**12%** Latinx, reflecting communities we serve



**92%** of scholars qualify for free-or reduced meals



**Nearly 50%** of Higher Achievement families have a household income of under \$25K

## How are scholars selected?

- Demand for the program exceeds space. Target student population = B/C students
- Students may be nominated by their teacher, interview for the program with their families, and are entered into a lottery.



# Higher Achievement Program Model

## Afterschool Academy

*September – May*

- Four nights per week
- Study hall (homework help & academic skill building)
- Free, healthy dinner
- Curriculum-based mentoring (STEM & Humanities)

## Summer Support

*June – August*

- 1:1 scholar meetings, family advising
- Free college tours
- Referrals to summer programs

## High School Placement

- Personalized coaching to apply to college-prep high schools (Maggie Walker, Appomattox, Open, Cristo Rey, etc)

# Our Approach: Head and Heart



College and  
Career Exposure



Caring Mentors



Academic  
Enrichment



Free, Healthy  
Meals



Culture of High  
Expectations,  
Support, and  
Social Justice



Social-Emotional  
Skill Building





# Our scholars defy the odds.

95%

of Higher Achievement scholars graduate high school on time, compared to graduation rate 73% in Richmond for economically disadvantaged students.

63-64%

of our scholars show improved grades in math and English Language Arts (ELA) annually.

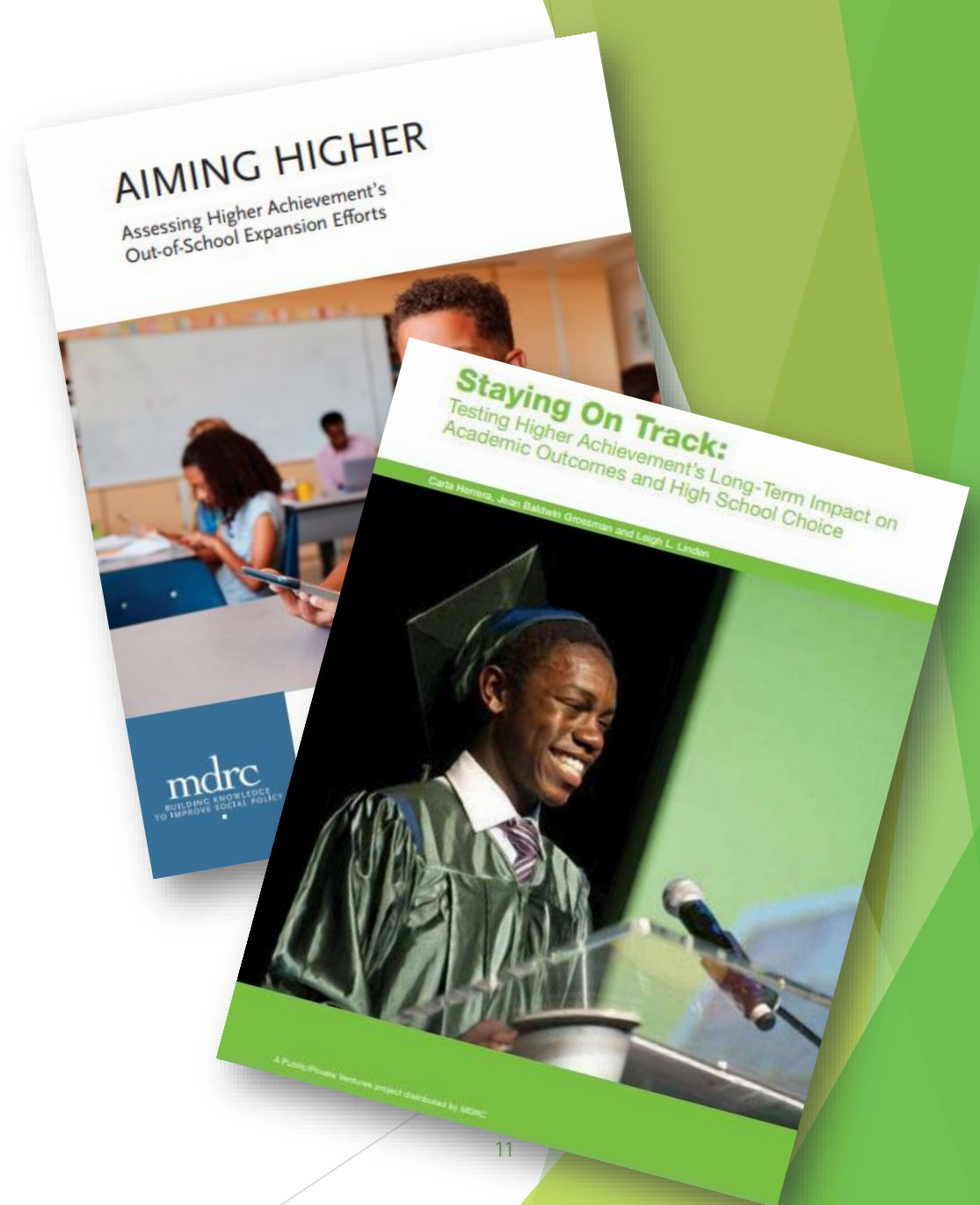


Results and Impact | Jean Grossman



# Proven Results

MDRC conducted two Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)s that showed **statistically significant impact in 3 areas** (published in 2013 and 2020): test scores (.11 effect size), high school placement, family engagement, and report card grades (0.2 effect size).





# History of Research

2006

## Launched first RCT with Public/Private Ventures

Support from Wallace Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, William T. Grant Foundation, Smith Richardson, Spencer. \$4.2 Million study over 7 years

2013

## First RCT Published

Statistical significance in math and reading test scores, college prep high school placement, family engagement.

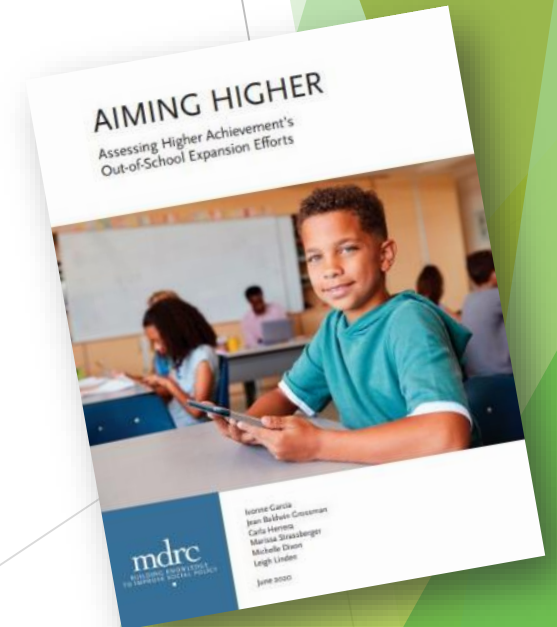
2015

## Won i3 grant from U.S. Department of Education

Launched 2nd RCT, again with support from the Wallace Foundation, as well as from the Rales Foundation and Venture Philanthropy Partners. \$2.1 million study over five years.

2020

## Second RCT Published



# Key Findings from 2020 RCT

## ► Report Card Grades – Positive Effects:

The effect size for overall GPA is 0.2

- These effects were witnessed in the **three new cities** to which we expanded – Baltimore, Richmond, and Pittsburgh.
- Strongest effects on students who started Higher Achievement **on grade level, who were retained for two years**, which is the program design.
- **Outsized positive effect on boys' math grades.** Without Higher Achievement, boys' math performance fell much more than it did for girls, with a p-value of .11.
- **Test scores** were positive in Year 2, but not statistically significant.

**Grades are linked to lifelong success.**







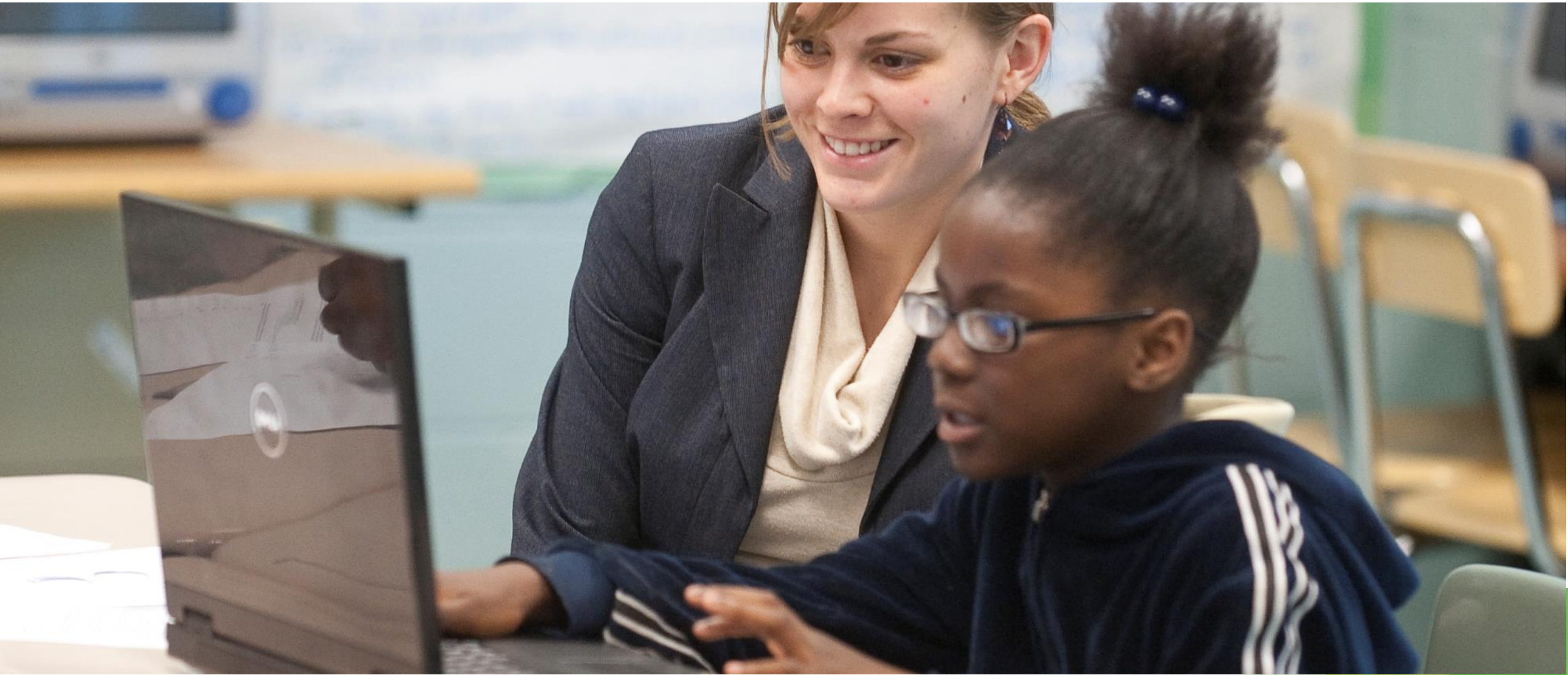
# Key Findings from Implementation Study - 2020

Mentor Recruitment,  
Retention, and  
Training Matters

Center Director  
Retention is Critical  
to Scholar Retention  
and Outcomes

Summer Academy  
Delivery is  
Challenging





Research in Practice | Lynsey Wood Jeffries



# Research in Practice → Higher Achievement 2.0

- ▶ **Serving more students within our cities**
- ▶ **Anchor Indicator:** College Prep High School Readiness and Placement
  - ▶ Expansion of Afterschool Academy
  - ▶ Increased family engagement
  - ▶ Summer partnerships
  - ▶ Center Support Team – for research practice continual loops and consistent, high quality trainings and resources
- ▶ **Covid-19 response:** streamlined program, integrated with schools
  - ▶ Virtual math pods
  - ▶ Humanities & high school placement mentoring
  - ▶ Social justice conversations and a racial equity plan





Results and Impact | Dr. Andrew Daire



# Field Implications

- ▶ Richmond education landscape benefits from the research of data-driven organizations like Higher Achievement.
- ▶ Keeping middle school students on track and engaged is key to on-time high school graduation.
- ▶ We must double down on the strategies we know will make an impact on our families and can change the entire community.



# Questions and Discussion



# THANK YOU FOR JOINING US!

For additional conversation and engagement:

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