

# Member Spotlight: Higher Achievement

BY TIANA J. REID, COMMUNICATIONS INTERN

Erica D. Pitts remembers being an average middle school kid who wasn't bothered by poor grades and academics. That is until her mother entered Pitts into Higher Achievement. Pitts noticed that she was surrounded by students who strived to be more than average and did not want to settle for Cs. Pitts decided that she wanted more as well. The teachers at Higher Achievement inspired Pitts to strive for better, not average. Pitts went on to graduate from the program and entered a top high school, Banneker Academic High School. Pitts continued her successful path through college and graduate school. That successful path led her right back to Higher Achievement, where she is now the communications manager.

Higher Achievement's rigorous after-school and summer academic program gives youth from at-risk communities their best opportunity to succeed in middle school — and in life. Their research-based program challenges middle school students to meet their full potential in three key areas: academics, social skills and leadership.

Founded in 1975, Higher Achievement currently serves more than 500 scholars per year and, in partnership with local schools, operates achievement centers in Washington, DC; Alexandria, Va.; Baltimore, Md., and soon, Richmond. The organization is expanding with plans to serve 2,300 scholars per year by 2015. On average, 95 percent of Higher Achievement scholars who complete the program advance to top academic high schools and 93 percent advance to college.

"When you look at our students on paper, you couldn't say that they are all 'A' students," Pitts said. "We're not looking for 'A' students, we want students who are willing to commit."

But Pitts can see the difference between Higher Achievement students and those who are not in the program, "They—Higher Achievement students—are empowered and more confident in their classrooms," Pitts said. "Our students really affect the culture in the classroom. They understand their role in their communities. They see problems in their communities and come to us with ideas to change those problems. They want to do something about it."

Recently, Higher Achievement celebrated the launch of its new Ward 8 Achievement Center, something the organization has been excited about for the past two years.

"It feels good to open a center in Ward 8," Pitts said. "I know the negativity that surrounds Ward 8 and it feels good to provide positive opportunities that underserved children in that ward would have missed before."

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Higher Achievement opens the doors of success to children who may not have been afforded the opportunity otherwise. The organization's teachers inspire their students to be greater than average, to go beyond minimal requirements and realize their potential to achieve academic success. The Center for Nonprofit Advancement supports Higher Achievement in its mission to create individuals who recognize academic advancement.

"The Center for Nonprofit Advancement is a huge resource for nonprofits," Pitts said. "For things we may not be able to afford, or if we have questions about things we are not familiar with, the Center is always a phone call away."

Higher Achievement has been the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions, including the 2005 winner of The Washington Post Award in Excellence in Nonprofit Management and the 2009 winner of the Coming up Taller award. Although it feels good for Higher Achievement to be recognized, it feels even better to know that they are changing the lives of their students and creating an opportunity for them unlike any other.

For more information about Higher Achievement visit <http://higherachievement.org/index.php> 