



MERIT

HEALTH LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

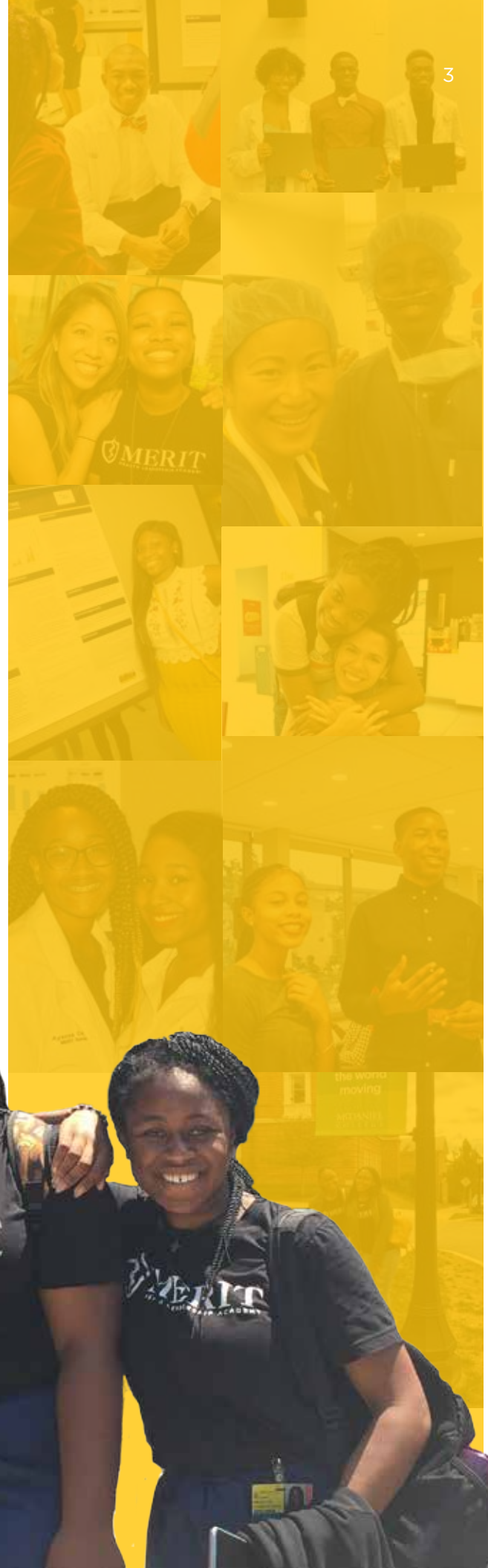
Annual Report 2018 - 2019







MERIT's mission is to educate and empower students from underrepresented backgrounds to become health professionals and change agents who advance equity. MERIT supports scholars through high school, college, and beyond, guiding them on their journeys towards becoming the next generation of doctors, nurses, researchers, and community leaders.



MERIT 2018-2019

MERIT's New Strategic Direction: College Success and Community Impact

MERIT was founded on the ideas that a diverse health workforce is key to reducing health disparities and that the best solutions lie within those communities most impacted by injustices. While most MERIT Scholars start the program with goals of becoming doctors, many become interested in public health, social work, environmental justice, politics, and more. This year, we took a step back to examine how the organization defines success and determine what MERIT needs to prioritize to achieve that success. To answer these big questions, we formed a strategic planning committee comprised of key stakeholders: scholars, alumni, parents, teachers, MERIT staff, board members, and health professionals. The group was tasked with tapping the insights of the broader MERIT community. After conducting many informational interviews, the committee reflected on and reformed MERIT's mission, vision, long-term goals, and three-year priorities. Having completed this inclusive, eight-month planning process, we enter the coming years with clarity and excitement about who MERIT alumni can become: college graduates, health professionals, and change agents.

In the strategic planning process, the committee affirmed MERIT's focus on health careers, and also emphasized the need to recognize change agents and community leaders, like the scholars featured throughout this report. We hope alumni will pursue impactful careers in an array of fields working to address the social determinants of health and broader upstream inequities. With this in mind, our program has evolved to show scholars the myriad ways they can work towards health equity both inside and outside of hospitals and clinics. This year, MERIT developed a new summer program option: the Community Health Internship (CHI). This internship gives MERIT Scholars the opportunity to address health disparities in partnership with effective community-based organizations. In the first summer of this new initiative, scholars worked to combat the opioid epidemic with the Baltimore City Health Department, build bridges between young men and the police with Project Pneuma, and more. Reflecting on her summer experience teaching children at the intimate partner violence shelter, House of Ruth, one scholar said, "I learned how trauma can affect the long-term

health of young children, but I also learned that strong relationships with supportive adults are part of the solution. This motivated me to bring positivity, joy, and love to our classroom every day." The future of Baltimore will be healthier with MERIT Scholars developing, leading, and supporting innovative initiatives to address the root causes of health disparities.

As MERIT Scholars work towards their long-term career goals, the first step is gaining acceptance to college. For the sixth year in a row, 100% of MERIT Scholars were accepted to four-year universities, and for the first time, the average SAT score rose above 1200. Although we are proud of these achievements, an acceptance is just the beginning. Support for MERIT alumni will be our organization's top priority over the next three years to ensure at least 80% of alumni earn a bachelor's degree. With this goal in mind, we hired a full-time College Success Manager who will support scholars through college and connect them with professional development opportunities. We are working to ensure that the MERIT family does not end in high school, but continues throughout our scholars' lives.

Thank you to everyone who is embarking on this journey with us to educate and empower students from underrepresented backgrounds to become college graduates, health professionals, and change agents. Our work would not be possible without a diverse coalition of supporters who believe in MERIT Scholars and their ambitious dreams. A new generation of leaders who will advance equity in health and beyond is forming. We can't wait to see what they accomplish next.

Tyler Mains, MD,
Co-Founder and Board Chair



Jake Weinfeld,
Executive Director



MERIT Strategic Direction

MISSION

MERIT educates and empowers students from underrepresented backgrounds to become health professionals and change agents who advance equity.

VISION

Tomorrow's health workforce will reflect the diversity of the communities it serves.

LONG TERM GOALS

GOAL 1: College Graduates - 80% of MERIT alumni will earn a bachelor's and/or graduate degree by 2030

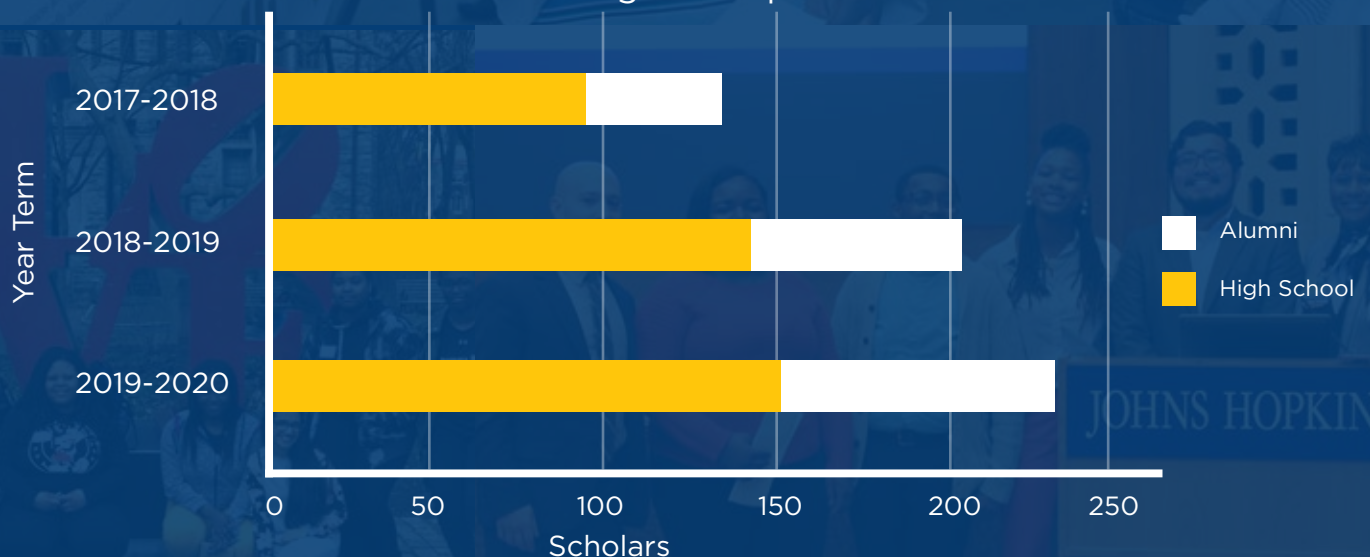
GOAL 2: Health Professionals - 35% of MERIT alumni will be in the health workforce or enrolled in a health professional graduate school track by 2030

GOAL 3: Change Agents - 80% of MERIT alumni will have participated in or led organizations, programs, and initiatives designed to improve the health and wellbeing of systemically marginalized individuals and communities by 2030

3-YEAR PRIORITIES

- 1. College Support:** Develop partnerships, programming, and an individual support model to propel alumni to become college graduates, health professionals, and change agents.
- 2. Model Replication:** Secure a large grant and partnerships to pilot the program in a new city between school year 2022 and 2025, without detracting from the Baltimore based program.
- 3. Data Infrastructure:** Improve data systems, processes, and people by increasing data staff capacity, transitioning to an enterprise database, and empowering staff to develop new processes.
- 4. External Communication:** Disseminate MERIT's promising practices and inspirational scholar stories to a broader audience.

Growing Our Impact





Rigorous Work Within MERIT

MERIT's rigorous programming supports scholars to achieve the high level of academic success required to become health care professionals. This year, in our clinical internship, scholars collaborated with their peers to analyze case studies and completed formidable medical school-level clinical homework assignments. Each night, scholars completed an average of 4.4 hours of homework to develop independent study skills necessary for success in higher education. Throughout their SAT preparation with MERIT, each scholar completed around 3,000 practice problems. Throughout high school, MERIT Scholars complete an average of 645 hours in our program. To ensure their success, MERIT supports each scholar with academic and professional mentors that serve as exemplary role models and help navigate the barriers to becoming a health professional. Scholars and their mentors create personalized plans for balancing intense coursework, SAT growth, and college applications.



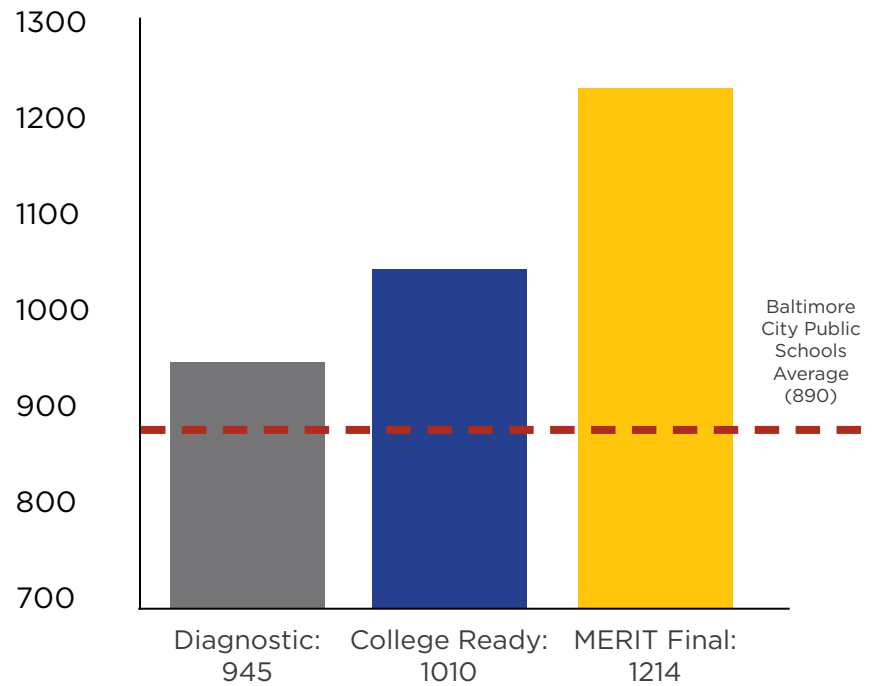
Academic Outcomes

269 SAT Growth

3.43 High School GPA

3.21 Undergraduate GPA

MERIT Class of 2020



Recent Alumni Spotlight: Antionette

During MERIT's intensive SAT preparation course, Antionette excelled due to her diligence and determination. Antionette grew her SAT score by 340 points, growing from her initial score of 960 to her final score of 1300. While managing advanced high school coursework as well as numerous MERIT commitments, Antionette lead a volunteer initiative called "Beats Per Minute," teaching weekly dance classes at a local middle school with another MERIT Scholar. Antionette continues to use choreographed dance to teach younger students to confidently care for themselves, and even secured a \$1,500 grant for her project!





Hands-On Science



Anatomy and Physiology Course

In the Anatomy and Physiology course, scholars learn about human body systems through a combination of advanced classroom-based instruction and engaging dissection and clinical simulation activities. At the end of each unit, scholars have the opportunity to go to the Simulation Center, where they participate in hands-on clinical training.

91%

MERIT Scholars
interested in health
careers



Health Careers Exploration

The Health Careers Explorations course was taught for the first time this past spring to our senior scholars, marking an expansion of our career exploration programming. The course assisted scholars in developing and understanding potential health career paths for themselves, helping them assess the requirements (educational, professional, and financial) of various paths. Such exploration allowed them to prepare for their ideal career and consider alternate pathways that fit their interests. Across all scholars, 85 unique STEM and health career paths were evaluated. Each scholar explored six different careers in-depth, reflecting on their strengths and passions and aligning themselves to best-fit careers.

83% MERIT Alumni interested
in health careers



Summer Internships



AMI: Art of Medicine Internship

Goal: Provide diverse career exposure

In the clinical internship, scholars observe health professionals treating patients in clinical settings. Over the course of the internship, scholars shadow up to 20 different health professionals in a variety of fields.

CHI: Community Health Internship

Goal: Empower scholars to work towards health equity

In the community health internship, scholars are given the opportunity to serve Baltimore through community-based organizations and public health initiatives. At their host sites, scholars learn from community leaders to become change agents and youth leaders advancing equity.

SMI: Science of Medicine Internship

Goal: Improve STEM & research skills

In the research internship, scholars perform laboratory and/or public health research under the guidance of a graduate student or professional scientist. The research mentor supports the scholar throughout their project and in the development of a college-level poster presentation.

After this summer in MERIT...



90%

“I intend to pursue a professional career that allows me to help improve the health or wellbeing of underserved communities.”

80

HOURS

in a STEM and/or health setting

95%

“I am more confident interacting with adults in a professional setting.”

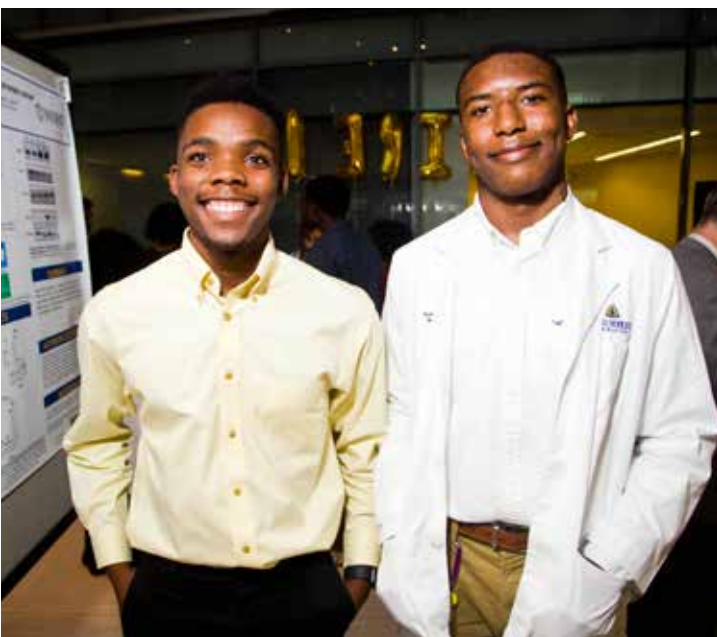
92%

“I am more confident in my ability to complete challenging work independently.”

“When I was with Dr. Lee, I was never bored. Both he and his attending would teach me about what was going on and then ask me about what they had just explained. He also gave me tips on how to study for big exams and what to keep in mind throughout the internship.”

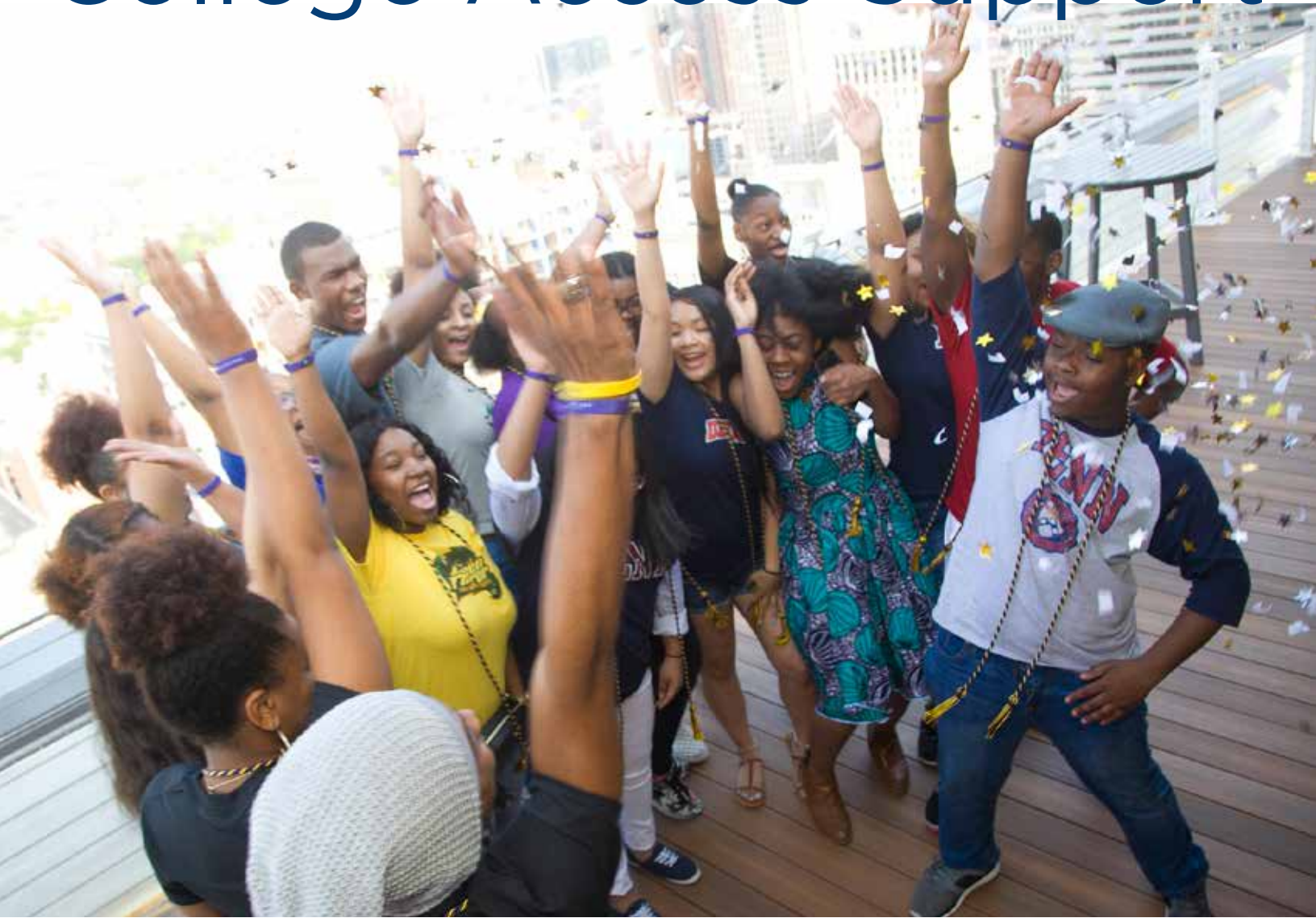
- Naomi, Class of 2021

Research Spotlight: Raekwon



For the past two years, Raekwon Williams has gone above and beyond the normal scope of MERIT internships and scholar research. This summer, Raekwon conducted prostate cancer research at the Bloomberg-Kimmel Institute for Cancer Immunotherapy in the lab of his research mentor, Dr. Jelani Zarif. Raekwon and Dr. Zarif examined the tumor microenvironment of prostate cancer and hypothesized that glutamine deprivation could convert dangerous M2 macrophages to the tumor-suppressing M1 form. Raekwon gave an award-winning presentation at the NIDA/NIA Poster Day and won the Becton Dickinson scholarship award for Best Presenter at a national Diversity Pipeline Symposium. Raekwon plans to continue this research through his senior year and in college on his path to becoming a physician scientist.

College Access Support



100
%

of MERIT Seniors
accepted to 4-year
universities.

\$10.4
MILLION

total academic
scholarships
earned.

75
%

college
graduation rate
(within 6 years of
graduating HS)



College Admissions Success

Our scholars' success in the admissions process continued this year, as scholars received 289 total acceptances to a variety of top-tier institutions, specialized programs, and best-fit colleges. This fall, the MERIT class of 2019 is attending:

- Benedict College
- Bowdoin College
- The Catholic University of America
- Coppin State University
- Cornell University
- DeSales University, Direct Entry PA Program
- Goucher College
- Johns Hopkins University
- McDaniel College (2)
- Morgan State University
- Northeastern University
- Stevenson University
- Towson University (3)
- University of Baltimore
- University of Maryland, Baltimore County
- University of Maryland, College Park (3)
- University of Miami
- University of Pennsylvania (3)
- University of Southern California



Scholar Spotlight: Erica

This past year, Erica graduated in the top three of her class, grew by 240 points on the SAT, and completed 22 college applications, more than any of her MERIT peers. She earned 21 college acceptances and matriculated to the University of Maryland, College Park on a full-ride scholarship. During her senior year, Erica designed a community health initiative titled "Speak Art," through which she taught elementary and middle school students about mental health and led art classes to combat stress and improve mental wellbeing. As a result of her exceptional work and accomplishments, Erica was honored with the prestigious Maryland Out of School Time (MOST) Youth of the Year Award and a \$1000 cash prize from the MOST Network.



MERIT not only educates and empowers its scholars to succeed academically, but also to become change agents that create meaningful, lasting change in their communities. Community-based organizations throughout Baltimore are working to address health disparities and inequities, and our scholars have joined them in their work through MERIT's various internships. After participating in community health initiatives, our scholars present their research and projects to friends, family members, community members, and health professionals at MERIT symposiums throughout the year. Events like MERIT's Scholar Impact Symposium feature inspiring speeches from scholars like Mame, who became a certified doula to support underserved women before and after giving birth.



Community Health Fellow Spotlight: Jazmine

Junior scholar Jazmine gave an impassioned speech at MERIT's Scholar Impact Symposium this June, in which she shared her personal struggle with dyslexia and anxiety. As a child, she prayed that her teachers would not call on her because she was so nervous about reading aloud. Jazmine's mother stayed up late reading with her every night for years, building her skills and confidence. On top of her college-level classwork and MERIT responsibilities, Jazmine gave back by volunteering with Bedtime in a Box, a Baltimore nonprofit that gives hygiene and reading products to low-income families. For her continuing work to support early childhood health and education, Jazmine was recently honored with the Family League of Baltimore's Youth Leadership Award.

Brancati Community Health Fellowship

As future health professionals, many MERIT scholars are not waiting to make a positive impact on their community. As part of our Brancati Community Health Fellowship (which completed its second year this past school year), scholars partnered with community organizations in year-long fellowships to improve health outcomes in Baltimore City. Scholar projects included an organ donation education campaign, an audit of STEM education in public schools, and the creation of a mobile preventative care clinic at a local church.



New Community Health Internship (CHI)

Through the tremendous success of the Brancati Community Health Fellowship, MERIT learned that its scholars are eager for more opportunities to learn about and work towards community health. This past summer, MERIT created a new summer internship program called the Community Health Internship (CHI), which includes learning experiences in both the classroom and at host sites through Baltimore. At their host sites (comprised of an array of community-based organizations), scholars worked throughout their summer breaks to address important community health issues.



Community Health Fellow Spotlight: Zion

Zion, of the MERIT class of 2019, showed her commitment to change by serving as a Brancati Community Health fellow for the past two years. She led an initiative aimed at creating community gardens in Baltimore's numerous food deserts, partnering with Blues Farm (the oldest black-owned farm in Baltimore), Parks & People, and Medicine for the Greater Good to support her initiative. Simultaneously, Zion performed spectacularly academically and in her various research internships, graduating valedictorian of her high school class and earning acceptances to every college she applied to, including Duke, UChicago, and UC Berkeley. Ultimately, Zion decided to matriculate to the University of Southern California on a highly-selective full scholarship. She currently plans on pursuing a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science while also completing pre-med coursework.

Extending the Pipeline



HPREP

MERIT led highly engaging Saturday sessions for 45 freshmen students during the school year. The sessions were developed in partnership with the Johns Hopkins Health Professions Recruitment and Exposure Program (HPREP), and provided STEM enrichment and an introduction to careers in health for underrepresented students. The sessions included a variety of engaging guest speakers and hands-on science activities.





9th Grade Bioengineering and Math

This summer, MERIT ran its Bioengineering and Math Internship (BMI) program to build the bridge for rising freshman and set them up for success as potential MERIT Scholars. These students spent the first half of each day at the Baltimore Underground Science Space (BUGSS) laboratory to develop their laboratory science skills before returning to the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine for foundational math coursework.

100%

I am motivated to pursue a career in STEM/healthcare because of my BMI experience

42%

Growth from MERIT pre- to post-BMI algebra exams



The MERIT Pipeline Comes Full Circle

This year, 8 of our alumni returned from college to re-join MERIT as teaching assistants in our summer programming. These students gave back to the program by supporting the professional development and STEM education of 9th grade participants in the Bioengineering and Math Internship. Our alumni continue to inspire the next generation of MERIT Scholars, sharing their wisdom and college experiences while instilling high expectations and a commitment to excellence.

MERIT Family



Mentorship Spotlight: Janielle and Mya

Mya Smith joined MERIT in pursuit of her dream to become a nurse. This summer, Mya was able to explore her passion for health equity through her research project with her mentor, Dr. Janielle Maynard of the Sfanos Pathology Lab at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Mya now hopes to become a public health nurse to combat health disparities in underserved communities.

"My experience over the summer with my research mentor was so enriching and rewarding. Dr. Janielle Maynard was an amazing mentor and friend to me. She was very patient, understanding, and always willing to help me with anything, even personal issues. We still keep in contact, and I hope to continue our relationship well into the future!" - Mya, Class of 2020



Key Institutional Partners

- Bedtime in a Box
- Baltimore City Health Department
- Baltimore City Office of Sustainability
- Baltimore City Public Schools
- Baltimore City Public Schools - Office of College and Career Readiness
- Baltimore Underground Science Space (BUGSS)
- Code in the Schools
- Donate Life Maryland
- House of Ruth Maryland
- Institute of Marine and Environmental Technology (IMET)
- Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center
- Johns Hopkins Center for Innovative Medicine
- Johns Hopkins Center for Social Concern
- Johns Hopkins Community Physicians
- Johns Hopkins Department of Surgery
- Johns Hopkins Health Systems Community Relations
- Johns Hopkins Hospital
- Johns Hopkins School of Medicine
- Johns Hopkins School of Nursing
- Johns Hopkins School of Public Health
- Johns Hopkins Student Outreach Resource Center (SOURCE)
- Johns Hopkins University MedHacks
- Maryland Out of School Time Network
- Maryland State Department of Education
- MarylandCAN
- Mayor's Office of Employment Development - City of Baltimore
- Medicine for the Greater Good
- myPlan App
- Project Pneuma
- Teach for America
- University of Maryland Incentive Awards Program
- University of Maryland Institute of Human Virology
- University of Maryland Medical Center
- Veterans Affairs Medical Center

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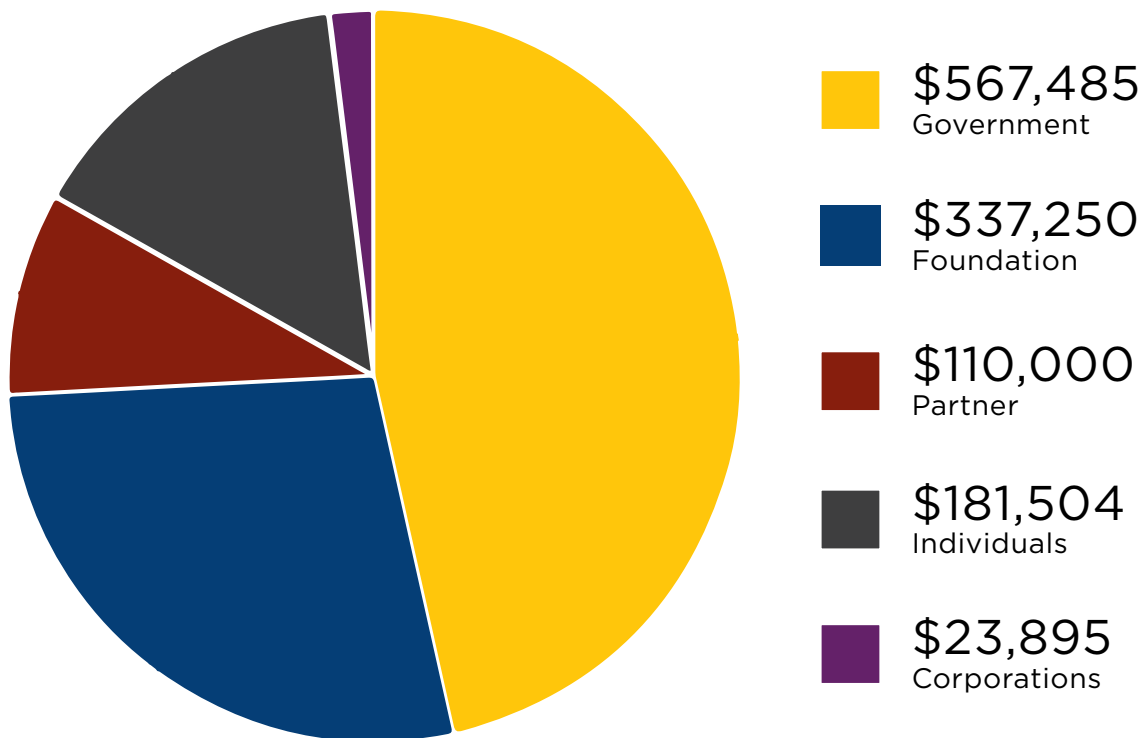
Financials

MERIT's growth over the past nine years would not have been possible without the generosity of our passionate and dedicated donor community. Most notably, the Johns Hopkins Medical Institution has been a pioneering partner and supporter since our organization's founding in 2010. MERIT's growth in recent years has been possible in large part due to support from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) through several different grant programs. Logos from these key supporters are included below:



MERIT is remarkably cost effective, with a cost per scholar less than half of the Wallace Foundation's "reasonable cost estimate" for a program of our size and scope.

Cost Per Scholar: \$3,520



FY19 Expenses: \$820,219

FY19 Revenue: \$1,220,134

*Note that due to the timing of some grants across two fiscal years, our fundraising total varies slightly from the total reported in our audited financial statements and Form 990 for FY19.

Donors

\$100,000 and Above

Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation
MSDE - 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant
MSDE - Next Generation Scholars Grant
MSDE - Public Schools Opportunity Enhancement Grant
Robert Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker

\$25,000 - \$99,999

Abell Foundation
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Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine
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\$10,000 - \$24,999

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\$1 - \$999

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