



THE COLLEGE BOUNDER

FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE BOUND, INC.

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Letter from the CEO

Dear Partners, Supporters, Students, Parents & Alumni,

Just like a Big Mac has its special sauce, FGCB has its own special ingredients—a blend of servant and transformational leadership, empathy, discipline, humility, integrity, and customized service—that sets us apart in college access and retention. For 34 years, FGCB has helped thousands of students attend and graduate from college with minimal debt by focusing on need-based financial aid.

FGCB's approach is rooted in my personal journey of servant leadership, upbringing and community values. We instill integrity and character development in students, challenging them to discover their talents and purpose through education. In today's world, where social media often overshadows mentorship, FGCB provides personalized guidance to ensure students succeed academically and in life.

A cornerstone of FGCB's mission is eliminating financial barriers for families from economically marginalized communities. Many students are unaware of the renewable need-based financial aid available to them. For example, the Class of 2023 secured \$13.2 million in financial aid over four years, minimizing debt.

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Joseph Fisher
CEO and Founder

A Message from the Lieutenant Governor



Aruna Miller, Maryland's 10th Lieutenant Governor, was the keynote speaker at First Generation College Bound's 2024 Annual Celebration. As the first woman of color and immigrant elected to statewide office in Maryland, Lt. Governor Miller delivered an inspiring address, opening with the powerful statement: "There are two most important days in your life: the day you were born and the day you discover why." She emphasized that "remarkable life stories aren't accidental; they are made to happen."

Lt. Governor Miller expressed gratitude to FGCB's leadership, including Gavin Brown, the Board of Directors, staff, alumni, and other stakeholders. She highlighted her collaboration with FGCB alumnus and State Senator Alonzo Washington on passing legislation for the Next Generation Scholars of Maryland Program, now administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission. She also commended Joseph Fisher for his tireless efforts to create opportunities for others.

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Letter from the CEO — continued from page one

However, trust remains a major obstacle. Families often hesitate to apply for need-based aid, while viewing academic or athletic scholarships as more prestigious. FGCB works to change this mindset, showing that even top universities like Harvard and Georgetown rely on need-based aid rather than merit scholarships.

FGCB's staff and coaches live by four core values:

Empathy: Listening deeply to understand students' and parents' needs.

Discipline: Staying focused on goals despite distractions.

Humility: Problem-solving with patience and understanding.

Integrity: Acting with honesty and responsibility at all times.



This customized approach ensures students attend the best-fit, affordable colleges and graduate with minimal debt.

One recent success story illustrates the impact of FGCB's approach to college affordability. FGCB worked with **twin sisters**—one of whom was accepted at the University of Maryland College Park (UMD) and the other at George Washington University (GW). Despite the much higher tuition at GW, the need-based aid package offered by GW made it more affordable than the in-state public university. This highlights the importance of focusing on need-based grants, which can often make even the most expensive colleges more affordable. Our work is all about **college affordability** and emphasizes the importance of prioritizing **need-based aid** in making college accessible.

FGCB urges families to embrace need-based financial aid to make college affordable and avoid significant debt. Our commitment to leadership, empathy, and integrity, combined with a focus on financial aid, continues to transform lives and open doors to higher education for under-resourced students.

This newsletter highlights some of our students and alums who have spoken at FGCB events over the past two years. They provide advice and encouragement for the students who are coming behind them about their FGCB experience, the college bound process, the challenges and rewards of higher education, and the importance of making a difference in their communities. These students are realizing the dream of going to college, earning a degree, and changing their lives.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe A. Fisher".

Joe Fisher
FOUNDER & CEO

A Message from the Lieutenant Governor

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Sharing personal stories of her journey as a young immigrant, Lt. Governor Miller recounted arriving in the U.S. at age seven, marveling at her first snowfall, navigating school as an ESOL student, and her father's touching interactions with her college professors, asking them to "keep an eye on his baby."

In her remarks, Lt. Governor Miller underscored the transformative power of service:

- > "When we serve, we create a gentler, kinder, more inclusive world."
- > "We shift from a life of consumption to a life of contribution."
- > "We move from 'me' to 'we.'"

She proudly highlighted Maryland as the first state to offer Service Year Options for high school graduates, providing jobs with a \$6,000 stipend. More details are available at www.serve.md.gov.

Closing on a personal note, Lt. Governor Miller declared, "I am a product of public education. I am a product of public investment." FGCB is proud to have her and Governor Wes Moore as champions of Joseph Fisher's vision and FGCB's mission of empowering students to pursue higher education.



FGCB College Success Program

The First Generation College Bound (FGCB) College Success program is a comprehensive initiative designed to support students at every stage of their college journey. The program consists of two key components:

- > **College Access:** This component provides personalized guidance to high school students, helping them navigate the complex process of identifying and gaining admission to best-fit, affordable colleges. Through tailored support, FGCB ensures that students are well-prepared for college applications and financial aid, setting them on a path toward higher education.
- > **College Retention:** Once students are enrolled in college, FGCB continues to offer ongoing support. This includes assistance with maintaining financial aid, offering encouragement, and promoting self-advocacy to ensure students stay on track through college graduation. FGCB's goal is to help students not only access higher education but also thrive throughout their college careers. Students remain in the program until they earn a bachelor's degree.

Meet some of the students on the following pages who participated in each aspect of the programs and what they had to say about their experiences with FGCB, and the lessons they want to share with other first generation college students.



Chimwekele Okoro, a proud member of DuVal High School's Class of 2024, began her college journey at Prince George's Community College in the fall of 2024, where she is pursuing her passion for writing. As a first-generation college student, Chimwekele reflects on the challenges she faced during the college application process and credits FGCB for providing the guidance and support that helped her navigate those difficulties.

Chimwekele is grateful for the mentorship she received from FGCB coaches, who she says always believed in her and never gave up on her. She found solace and strength through FGCB's programs, from Career Puppy workshops to college visits, which not only helped her discover her interests but also introduced her to a community of peers who shared her journey.

Inspired by a quote she recently encountered—"Life has no remote... Get up and change it yourself"—Chimwekele reflected on the importance of choice and perseverance. She emphasized the power of deciding to overcome distractions and take control of one's destiny, a lesson that FGCB instilled in her throughout her time in the program.

Chimwekele also shared **the biblical story of Esther**, drawing parallels between Esther's courage and the challenges students face in creating their futures. "There comes a time when all fear must fade, and it will be your turn to leave your mark on the pages of history," she remarked. She encouraged her fellow graduates to **listen to their inner voice, put aside distractions, and step into their destinies with confidence.**

Looking ahead, Chimwekele is excited to develop her skills as a writer and explore opportunities that align with her passion for storytelling. She is grateful for FGCB's role in shaping her journey and is determined to honor the lessons she has learned as she forges her path forward.





Halimat Abiodun, a 2023 graduate of Fairmont Heights High School, began her freshman year at Morgan State University in fall 2023. Initially uncertain about how to achieve her college aspirations,

Halimat considered attending an out-of-state school without realizing the financial implications. FGCB provided essential guidance, helping her complete paperwork and navigate her options with one-on-one support and encouragement.

With FGCB's help, Halimat decided to attend Morgan State University, where she is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. She believes this decision was the best both financially and academically, as Morgan's nursing program is highly regarded.

Halimat is grateful for FGCB's role in her success, especially during stressful times. She credits the program's personalized support for helping her clarify her goals and build confidence in her abilities.

Looking ahead, Halimat encouraged her peers to embrace their strengths, reminding them, "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." Inspired by her own journey, she is excited to pursue a career in nursing and make a difference in her field.



FGCB's Mission Statement:

FGCB exists to inspire low-income and first-generation youth to achieve social and economic success by providing advice, encouragement, and support to obtain a college degree.



Eden Yosef earned her Associate degree in General Studies from Montgomery College in Rockville with the class of 2024. She matriculated at the University of Maryland – Shady Grove in fall 2024 to complete her bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Eden reflects on her academic journey with deep gratitude for First Generation College Bound (FGCB), which she describes as a source of unwavering support and guidance throughout her educational pursuits.

Eden credits FGCB with helping her navigate the uncertainties of higher education as a first-generation college student, especially during her senior year in 2020. She emphasizes how the program provided her with a sense of belonging and resilience, saying, "You are surrounded by people who have felt and been where you are." Through the dedication of FGCB's staff, whom she considers family, Eden gained confidence and the tools to overcome challenges. "Thank you for helping us all feel seen and heard," she said, acknowledging FGCB's commitment to her success.

Quoting Aristotle, Eden shared a message of perseverance: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." She encouraged her peers to trust in their abilities, take life one step at a time, and recognize that growth comes from both challenges and triumphs. Eden reminded the Class of 2024 to celebrate their wins and progress, no matter the pace, urging them to embrace the rhythm of their own journeys.

As Eden prepares for the next phase of her education, she carries forward the lessons learned and friendships forged through FGCB, confident that the journey ahead holds endless possibilities.



Our Vision:

One day every Marylander will have access to an affordable college education.



Jayde Martinez, a 2023 graduate of Towson University and now a Pathways Regulatory Compliance Analyst at Northrop Grumman, shared her heartfelt journey of perseverance and self-discovery, encouraging others to face their fears and embrace change. As a first-generation college student, Jayde reflected on the doubts and challenges she faced leading up to college, including balancing work and school, financial concerns, and disappointing SAT scores.

Despite these obstacles, Jayde chose to take a leap of faith. “Why not give it a shot?” she thought, applying to Towson University, Morgan State University, and the University of Maryland College Park. Though she didn’t meet the requirements for College Park, she embraced Towson, attracted by its reputation for diversity and inclusion. That decision, she shared, turned out to be “one of the best choices I’ve ever made.”

Throughout her journey, Jayde learned the value of trying, even when fear and self-doubt threatened to hold her back. “I started talking myself out of things because I was scared of trying something new,” she admitted. But by stepping outside her comfort zone, Jayde discovered her resilience and experienced personal growth.

Jayde offered this advice: “The only way to know if you can do something is by actually doing it—facing it and giving it your all, even when you’re nervous, defeated, or fearful.” She reminded students that life is constantly changing, and while change can be intimidating, it also brings opportunities for growth and wisdom.



*“Success is not final, failure is not fatal:
It is the courage to continue that counts.”*

- Winston Churchill



Erinayo Soniregun, a 2024 graduate of Georgetown University, earned his master's in professional studies (MPS) with a specialization in Emergency & Disaster Management, focusing on Conflicts and Technological Disasters. Speaking with FGCB students in the class of 2024, Erinayo shared an inspiring journey marked by resilience, self-discovery, and the transformative power of education.

Nearly two decades ago, Erinayo graduated from high school with dreams of becoming a professional athlete and lawyer. While talented in soccer and basketball, his aspirations of being scouted for college basketball were derailed by a knee injury in 2009. Facing average grades and limited prospects, he even considered joining the U.S. military instead of pursuing higher education.

Encouraged by his mother's belief in his potential, Erinayo connected with FGCB. He vividly recalls the day Mr. Fisher entered his home, offering guidance and emphasizing the importance of education and lifelong learning. With support from Mr. and Mrs. Fisher and the FGCB team, Erinayo felt empowered to pursue higher education and professional success.

Erinayo went on to play college basketball and later joined the U.S. Marine Corps as an officer, where he gained invaluable global experiences. Today, he continues to serve others through an organization he founded, dedicated to uplifting the African Diaspora by fostering economic growth, education, and community outreach.

Erinayo shared a profound message about the importance of perspective, noting, "Perspective broadens reality to a universal scale. It allows you to look at life from as many angles as possible and opens an element of your being described as enlightenment." He emphasized that perspective is earned through experience and education. "Do everything and anything with a mindset of gaining perspective and bettering the community around you," he said.

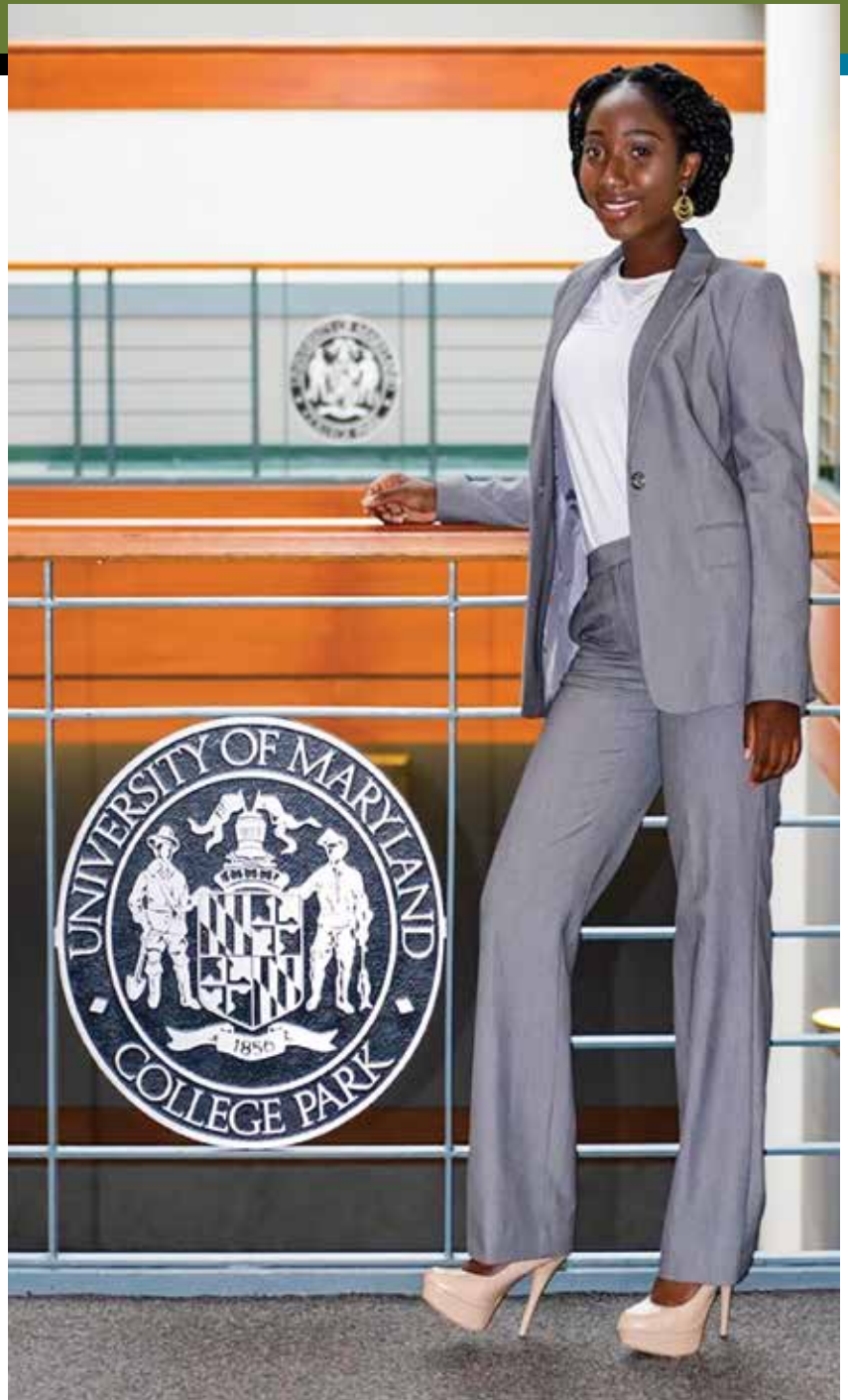




After graduating from Laurel High School in 2016, Clydelle went on to obtain her B.S. in Public Health from University of Maryland in 2020, and a Master of Public Health from Temple University in 2022.

While obtaining a college education had been a dream of hers, the road to getting there as an immigrant and first in her family to attend college seemed unclear. She became a part of FGCB in her freshman year of high school and was able to navigate the complicated process of applying for university admissions and for financial aid with the help of FGCB coaches.

Clydelle witnessed the multiplier effect of FGCB's work as she was able to pass on knowledge and skills about the college application process to her family and community. She eloquently reiterated that "If you give a man a fish you feed them for a day. If you teach a man to fish you feed them for a lifetime". She is grateful to FGCB for teaching her how to "fish"- to gain valuable skills that have carried her through college and her professional career, while allowing her to make an impact on her community.



*"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up.
The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."*

— Thomas Edison



Dr. Maame Adobea Amoyaw, a 2023 graduate of American University's Education Policy and Leadership doctoral program, address FGCB students with an inspiring message rooted in resilience, self-discovery, and gratitude. A graduate of Laurel High School and a first-generation college student, Dr. Amoyaw shared how FGCB played a vital role in shaping her journey through high school, college, and beyond.

Reflecting on her journey, she recalled the support of FGCB staff, including Raymond, who guided her through high school, and Ms. Judy, whose prayers and wisdom encouraged her. "Graduating isn't the end of your relationship with FGCB but the beginning," she said, highlighting how FGCB also supported her siblings through college, making it a generational organization.

Dr. Amoyaw delivered several powerful lessons, blending wisdom with humor and cultural references. Drawing on Beyoncé's anthem, she emphasized, "You can't break my soul," encouraging graduates to build resilience, set their own pace, and not let challenges define them. She shared her personal struggles, such as failing a college economics class, and how those experiences strengthened her resolve.

"Get your people in formation," she advised, stressing the importance of building a supportive community that challenges and uplifts. She also urged graduates to listen to their gut—"that still, small voice"—to guide their decisions and to embrace opportunities that align with their passions, even if they deviate from original plans.

Most importantly, Dr. Amoyaw encouraged the Class of 2023 to fall "dangerously in love" with themselves, to explore who they are, and to cherish the newest version of themselves as they step into the next chapter of life. "You're a part of something way bigger," she said, reminding them of their value and role in the world.

Dr. Amoyaw expressed her deep gratitude for FGCB and its lifelong impact. "If your soul ever feels broken, FGCB will help you pick up the pieces," she said. She celebrated the graduates and reminded them to carry forward the lessons, love, and support they have received.





Felicia Myers is the proud mother of two First Generation College Bound (FGCB) alumni, Xavier and Jalen Sikes, who graduated from Laurel High School in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Xavier earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from Bowie State University in 2019, while Jalen completed a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Bowie in 2021.

Felicia recalls how FGCB played a vital role in her sons' success, offering support from middle school through college. She emphasizes that FGCB not only built their confidence and resilience but also provided invaluable resources for families, such as FAFSA guidance and access to in-state college funding. Felicia credits FGCB with helping her sons stay focused and motivated, even during challenging times.

One of those challenges came when the family experienced an apartment fire, testing their resilience. Despite the hardship, both Xavier and Jalen returned to college, motivated by FGCB's constant check-ins and care packages. Felicia shares that the program's unwavering support inspired her as well—she returned to school to earn her own degree, following her sons' example.

Today, both Xavier and Jalen are dedicated to giving back to their communities, a reflection of the values instilled by FGCB. Felicia's message to other parents is one of encouragement: "Support your children and trust the FGCB program. What may seem impossible can become possible with the right support system."



Impact on Education

OUR IMPACT IN 2024 DUE TO YOUR SUPPORT

STUDENTS WHO HAVE ENTERED COLLEGE: **3,435**

STUDENTS ARE CURRENTLY PURSUING COLLEGE DEGREES: **2,119**

STUDENTS EARNED HIGHER EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENTS: **1139;**
179 ASSOCIATES, 783 BACHELOR'S, 158 MASTER'S, 19 PHDS/PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES

STUDENTS WHO PURSUED MILITARY SERVICE: **42**

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Save The Date!

35TH ANNUAL CELEBRATION

Wednesday, June 11, 2025 @ 7:00pm

University of Maryland College Park, Samuel Riggs IV Alumni Center

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