

# **Achieve Appoints Melissa Sawyer as Executive Director, Positioning the Education Nonprofit for its Next Phase of Growth**

***Nationally recognized nonprofit leader and co-founder of the New Orleans–based Youth Empowerment Project to lead Achieve***

**Miami – March 30, 2026** – [Achieve](#), one of South Florida's most impactful education nonprofits, has appointed Melissa Sawyer to lead the organization as its next Executive Director. Sawyer is a national leader in the youth development and education space with more than two decades of experience, having most recently served as co-founder and CEO of the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) in New Orleans, Louisiana. Her selection is the culmination of a national, months-long search conducted by Achieve's Board of Directors as the organization celebrates its 10th anniversary.

Founded in 2015, Achieve (formerly known as Achieve Miami) connects students, teachers, and community partners through mentorship, enrichment, and career-readiness initiatives designed to strengthen the region's education ecosystem. The organization operates programs in more than 260 schools and has served over 15,000 students. Its Teacher Accelerator Program (TAP), designed to address the region's teacher shortage, has recruited, trained, and graduated more than 500 aspiring educators to date. Now marking a decade of impact, Achieve is building on this momentum to drive even greater outcomes for students, educators, and the broader community.

Sawyer co-founded the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) in New Orleans in 2004 and, as CEO, grew it from a three-person startup into an internationally respected organization that today includes more than 40 team members and a \$6 million annual budget. Under her leadership, YEP expanded from Louisiana's first reentry program for justice-engaged young people into a comprehensive youth development organization providing mentorship, educational support, workforce readiness, and enrichment programming.

In her new role, Sawyer will work closely with Achieve Founder and President Leslie Miller Saiontz and the Board of Directors to implement the nonprofit's strategic plan and guide its next phase of growth. She will oversee operational, programmatic, and fundraising initiatives while strengthening partnerships with community leaders, donors, and educational institutions.

"I am delighted that Melissa is joining the Achieve team as our Executive Director. Melissa is a visionary leader whose career reflects a deep commitment to young people, community, educational opportunity, and systemic change," said Miller Saiontz. "She has built and sustained a high-impact organization over two decades, and we are confident her experience growing programs and building strong partnerships will help propel Achieve into its next chapter."

Sawyer succeeds Lydia Muñiz, who served as Achieve's Interim Director during a period of significant expansion. Over the past four years, Muñiz helped strengthen program infrastructure, deepen community partnerships, and support the organization's growing reach across South Florida. Muñiz will remain engaged with the organization in an advisory capacity to ensure a smooth leadership transition.

"Achieve's commitment to ensuring young people have access to mentorship, academic opportunity, and meaningful career pathways aligns deeply with my own values and experience," said Sawyer. "I'm excited to join the Miami community and to work alongside Leslie, the Achieve Board, and a talented and committed team. I am looking forward to building on the strong foundation in place as we expand opportunities for students across Miami-Dade and beyond."

Sawyer has a B.A. from McGill University in Montreal, PQ, and an M.Ed. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She began her career in New Orleans with Teach for America (TFA). Following this, she dedicated three years to reforming Louisiana's juvenile justice system before establishing YEP in 2004.

For her leadership at YEP, she received numerous top honors, including Woman of the Year by CityBusiness (2024), CEO of the Year by Biz New Orleans Magazine (2022), and recognition by The Times-Picayune as one of the "300 People Over 300 Years Who Have Made New Orleans, New Orleans" (2018).

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## **ABOUT ACHIEVE**

Achieve is a nonprofit working to expand educational opportunities across South Florida. In partnership with schools, educators, community leaders, and private sector partners, Achieve designs and delivers programs that prepare students to compete and thrive in school and beyond, while also training strong, classroom-ready teachers. Since 2015, the organization has served more than 15,000 students and trained over 500 educators. By working at both the student and educator level, Achieve is helping create more connected, effective systems that drive lasting impact. Learn more at [www.achievemiami.org](http://www.achievemiami.org)

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