

# An ABC journey opens new opportunities

"College is the place where I'll find all of these open doors that I can just walk through," states a visibly energized Felicia Reyes, referring to her next four years at the University of Southern California on a full-ride scholarship.

"I am most looking forward to the many classes I can choose. It's one of the few times in life where you can study philosophy or sociology... or just about anything. I'll study hard in my major, but I'll look at all these other options, too."

## Top Award

Felicia Reyes has won the top annual award of national A Better Chance for excelling in academics and leadership despite difficult obstacles. (See "President's message.")

Reyes plans to focus on neuroscience with an emphasis on addiction. "I've seen first-hand what addiction can do [to others]. I want to help."

Felicia's ABC story began four years ago as she was on her way to becoming valedictorian of her

8th-grade class at a large under-resourced middle school in Anaheim, Calif.

"I was always academically focused," she recounts.

She was motivated to attend a good college, but she realized that it would be a challenging leap from her hometown high school, with its 50% dropout rate.

Now, four years later and her dream of college realized, Felicia affirms that being an ABC student is about much



Felicia Reyes

more than just gaining access to a better high school....(continued inside)

## President's message



Mary E. Pritchard

In the final stretch of both the 2012-2013 school year and my tenure as president, I could hope for no greater gift than the news that our senior scholar, Felicia Reyes, has been chosen to receive our national office's highest award.

Felicia won the Judith Berry Griffin Award for three remarkable achievements: outstanding academic performance, exceptional and steadfast determination to persevere and

achieve in spite of obstacles encountered in life, and demonstrated leadership ability.

Felicia was chosen from among ABC graduating seniors at more than 300 schools across the U.S.

This award could not go to a more deserving A Better Chance scholar—one who exemplifies the huge difference that this program can make!

Since Felicia's arrival at Andover ABC, I have watched her transformation from a teen coming from difficult circumstances to a young adult who is carefully laying the groundwork for her college ...(continued inside)

education and career. Felicia's goal and drive to succeed academically have been clear from the moment she arrived as an ABC scholar. I continue to be inspired and awed by her work ethic, integrity, intellectual curiosity and unusual discipline.

Felicia's accomplishments show dramatically what the ABC program can do for a young person who hungers for the rigorous education that Andover High School can provide.

She has learned time management skills, how to advocate for herself, how to ask for help, how to navigate in a community unlike her own, and how important it is to be engaged in one's school and community.

Like the 130 Andover ABC scholars before her, Felicia will move on to college with a strong foundation and with the tools she needs to succeed. This is what makes our work so special: watching talented ABC scholars like Felicia grow into confident and empowered young women who are prepared and motivated to have a positive impact in the world.

Next fall, two new students, A'mari Bing-Way and Nilda Vega, will join the Andover A Better Chance program and with their arrival, this transformative

journey begins anew. It is a process that we guide with hope and pride.

I started my term as president by pointing to the scholars as inspiring examples of courage and determination in the face of a new and daunting challenge, much like what I faced in my new role as president.

Throughout these three years, I have used the words "bright, capable, talented, courageous, and determined" more than any other time in my life. The ABC scholars have taught me day after day what these words mean. I have watched these amazing young women tackle each year with hard work and determination, face challenges and disappointments, experience high achievement and accomplish goals and, most of all, have the courage to get out of their comfort zones. That is what has inspired me throughout my tenure as president.

As I wind down my term as president, Felicia prepares to begin her freshman year at the University of Southern California. When I think of the future, it is Felicia's own wise counsel to incoming ABC scholars that I realize will serve both of us well: "stay open to all that is new around you."

*Mary E. Pritchard*

## Activities instill leadership

Their activities list runs from student government and sports to dance, filming and community volunteering. The A Better Chance scholars seemed busier than ever.

"Our program encourages them to join in activities at Andover High School as well as community service projects in keeping with our leader-development goals," said Gaby Nossiff, leader of ABC scholar enrichment.



JV player Fatouma Koné

- **Felicia Reyes**, capping four years in our program, was on the AHS Senior Board at school while putting in 15 hours per week of childcare at the Shed after-school program. Her college-application work paid off with acceptance by USC with a full scholarship.
- **Abbi Awodele**: Emergency Room volunteer at Lawrence General Hospital... AHS Chamber Choir, which placed third in national competition... trip to

China in April with the AHS Chinese Department... AHS Debate Team, Boston Red Cross and Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program.

- **Jazzare Mays**: managed the AHS girls varsity basketball team... taking weekly ballet and jazz classes at Dance Infusion studio... volunteering weekly at the Lawrence Boys and Girls Club... member of the AHS Junior Board.
- **Deanna Starr**: high jumper in the AHS winter and spring track program, volunteering at Ironstone Farm for people with disabilities... founder of the Key Club at Andover High... member of the Bible Club.
- **Ariel Leachman**: won a scholarship to Massachusetts College of Art & Design's Fashion Intensive program during spring break... on the Teen Spoken Word team at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston... filming sporting events for AHS... Andover School of Ballet and piano lessons at Boston Music Center.
- **Xonatia Lee**: pushing herself on many fronts, including running winter track following a grueling field hockey season, which shows maturity and impressive time-management skills; participated in the ABC 5K run/walk.
- **Fatouma Koné**: on the AHS Girls JV Basketball team, often as a starter, in an impressive season with very few losses... also serves on the AHS student government Sophomore Board.





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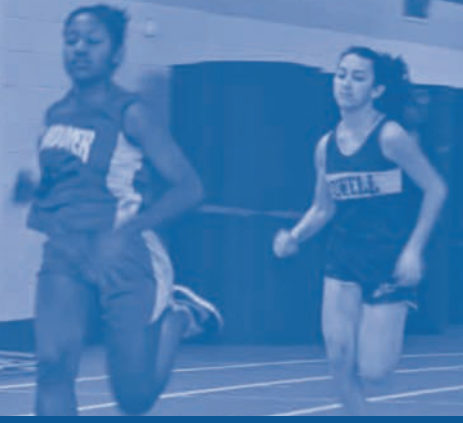
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A 5K run/walk this spring attracted more than 250 participants and raised \$4,500 for Andover ABC and \$1,500 more for Boston Marathon bombing victims. Here, ABC scholar and sophomore Xonatia Lee (foreground) is off to a good start.





## ABC journey...continued from page 1

"Being an ABC student gave me resources, but it also gave me a good environment to study so that I could excel," she explains. "I know if I was back home in a less stable environment, it would have been much more difficult."

Felicia says that she also gained invaluable skills of adaptability and acumen with diverse groups of people. "If I had gone to a regular school ... those kids [there] will go to college and they'll see kids from all walks of life for the first time. Coming from Andover, I can adapt to all types of kids and people. Some are wealthy, some are not; I've seen all sides."

Her time in Andover also has opened her eyes to the basic opportunity inequities in education. Here she saw "the world that my brothers and sisters back home will never know, and they don't even know what they are missing," she says. "It's hard to see it, but it's also a good thing to know."

"My friends back home, they don't know about the college process because no one has talked to them about it."

Felicia discovered her academic passion during her sophomore biology class. She followed it up with AP biology her junior year, and had to take honors chemistry simultaneously, her AHS guidance counselor Kim Bergey recounts.

"She worked diligently to learn as much as possible. Second semester last year, she chose a notoriously rigorous honors pre-calculus class, and, despite earning her lowest grade to date, she was persistently

working with her teacher and tutor to improve, and was proud of the material she mastered."

Not one to rest on her laurels, Felicia is taking honors calculus, physics, and AP environmental science this year.

Outside school, Felicia joined the local crew team, although she never had stepped foot in a crew boat, and tutored young girls at the Esperanza Academy in Lawrence, where she was so loved that she secured a job there the summer before her junior year. She currently works at the after-school program at Kids Club.

She recalls her time with the young girls at Esperanza Academy as particularly memorable, as she saw herself in the lives of many of them. "I really enjoyed it because Lawrence is a town similar to where I came from," she explained. "I could tell them that there is more to life; you just have to work hard."

She also served as a Freshman Orientation Leader for ABC high school freshmen entering schools across the country.

Felicia's older sister also attended USC, but Felicia notes that is not the reason she chose it. "I actually want to be able to find my own way," she says. However, she acknowledges that it will be good to be near family after four years on the East Coast, an experience that Felicia describes as transformative.

"ABC showed me the possibility of what my life can be."

## Two to join ABC

Andover ABC will welcome two 9th-graders into the program in the fall.

A'Mari Bing-Way, from Waldorf, Md., is an excellent student with a special interest in the visual arts. She is an only child and is excited about the opportunity for connection offered by ABC's group living environment.

Nilda Vega is from New Haven, Conn. She is a serious student who looks forward to the challenging studies as well as competing in sports at Andover High School. She is on the Student Council in her current school.

## Can you help us?

With a house to maintain, Andover ABC always needs certain equipment and supplies. If you can donate any of the following items, new or used, please tell Susan Connolly at [seconn@bellsouth.net](mailto:seconn@bellsouth.net).

- Sewing machine
- Office-class black & white, duplex laser printer
- Outdoor lounge chairs
- Umbrella base for outdoor table
- Reflective running vests, elastic workout bands, small weights for power walks, medicine ball, small dumbbell, jump rope
- Bike lock, chain or cable
- Women's health and fitness magazines
- Bags of apples, oranges, bananas, carrots, grapefruits, nuts, trail mix

Thanks to John & Maria Bartlett, Robert Matthews & Eileen Shannon, and Frank & Karen Schnorrenberg for their recent household donations.

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## ABC Boosters: Tom & Eileen Sharkey

“Andover A Better Chance has enriched our lives for over 25 years. We’ve had the opportunity to know, on a personal level, many strong young women who leave the security of their homes and come to Andover to pursue educational opportunities. As **ABC Host Parents**, our entire family was inspired by the perseverance and courage of our ABC students. As **educators**, we know that Andover High School has benefited from the presence of role-models who work hard to achieve goals. As **community members**, we realize that the ABC program has helped all of us understand the value of diversity in creating caring communities. Thank you, Andover ABC!”

–Tom Sharkey, former AHS principal, and Eileen Sharkey, former North Andover elementary school teacher.



## Telling the ABC story

During the past few months, a team of our board members has worked with professionals to create a new video about Andover A Better Chance and also refine the communication tools that the organization uses to describe its role.

To make the video, we talked with ABC scholars and alumni, current and former staff at Andover High School, an ABC leader and a host parent. Professional videographers Richard Dallett and Michael Yip recorded and assembled the interviews to tell the story of how ABC gives motivated female students of color the special chance of attending Andover High School in order to enter a top-rate college and also develop their leadership potential.

At the same time Andy Shen, a communications consultant who works with global companies, led the effort to affirm the nonprofit organization’s mission statement and fine-tune its outreach publications. He describes the process as tightening and refining the way ABC talks about what it does.

Andover A Better Chance initiated the process to make its communications strategy more effective as a way to save both volunteer time and resources.

“We want to be able to tell a convincing story of what we do, where we go and what we stand for,” said Kate Margoese, member of the Communications Committee.

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