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## Student Spotlight

February 2019

**Zachary Thompson**  
**Bulloch Academy**  
**Statesboro, GA**



“Zach being able to attend Bulloch Academy has been one of the very few positive things that have happened for our family this year,” says Marne Thompson. After experiencing what felt like the hardest year of their lives, Marne is confident that being a recipient of an AAA Scholarship was the light at the end of their tunnel.

Marne and her husband Steve are the proud parents to their incredible son, Zach. In the Thompson household, Marne is the primary source of income. Steve has quite a few health issues preventing him from being able to maintain a regular work schedule, which has led to him having a difficult time maintaining a job. While it puts an emotional and financial strain on Steve and Marne to provide for their family, their primary motivation has always been that Zach has a fulfilling life, even if that means giving up a few things. When it was time for Zach to start Pre-K, the Thompsons patiently waited to see if they had landed a spot at Bulloch Academy since there were limited openings available. Marne and Steve were both optimistic and nervous – the state of Georgia has a state-funded lottery program which allows children to attend Pre-K, but due to limited available spaces, there is no guarantee that a child will be able to attend. Luckily, a spot opened up two weeks before school began and Zach was chosen to attend.

The school was more than Steve and Marne could've ever wished for their son; the teachers were loving and attentive, and the students treated each other with respect, even at a young age. The high school level had a 100 percent graduation rate, with a track record of their graduates being accepted into one of their top three college choices. The Thompsons really wanted Zach to have the opportunity to attend Bulloch Academy through high school. However, Bulloch Academy is a private school, and the state only offered financial assistance to Pre-K

students. With assistance from both sets of parents and another program, Marne and Steve were able to scrape together enough money for Zach to continue to attend Bulloch Academy after Pre-K was completed and the state-funded assistance was no longer available. Additional family support enabled him to continue his schooling at Bulloch Academy.

As he moved from Pre-K to Kindergarten and then first grade, Zach's parents began to notice how he would process his emotions differently compared to other children his age as well as have difficulty controlling certain impulses such as speaking out of turn, touching items and humming or singing at inappropriate times. Thankfully they had a close relationship with Zach's teacher, and they felt comfortable enough to ask her questions, such as how was he acting in class, was he behaving the same way the other students were, etc. After countless conversations, and seeking professional advice from his pediatrician, Zach was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Marne and Steve were insistent about being open and honest with their son regarding his diagnosis. They wanted him to know that this didn't define who he was or give him any reason to behave a certain way. Having ADHD, it took Zach longer to process certain emotions, but with medication, and being able to be unapologetically open with his parents, Zach never felt as if he wasn't "normal." Some days were more difficult than others, and it was especially hard when Zach's grandmother unexpectedly passed away. The two shared a special bond and Zach had a hard time processing the thought of his grandmother not being a phone call away anymore.

Several other situations happened around the same time – including changes in employment – so there was no longer additional financial assistance from their family to help cover the cost of tuition. "To remove Zach from the school he loves, and away from the friends that he has made, simply because of our family finances, would have been devastating for him," says Marne. Marne spent weeks researching scholarship programs until she came across the AAA Scholarship Foundation. "Without the AAA Scholarship Foundation, his world would have been turned upside down."

During 2017-18, Zach and the Thompson family experienced additional struggles. Multiple health issues for both Steve and Marne, two more grandparents passing away, a potentially stressful transition to middle school, and further financial struggles that were almost too much to bear. However, with the support and understanding of Zach's teachers, his pediatrician, and the close relationship between Zach and his parents, he continues to thrive.

Now in the 6th grade at Bulloch Academy, Zach has truly transformed into the young man Marne and Steve always imagined he would be. While he has not always been a straight A student, this year he made honor roll and was selected to be a part of the Duke Talent Identification Program (TIP), which helps gifted students assess the extent of their academic abilities with above-grade-level testing. Also, Zach was recognized on Honors Day with a citizenship award, a reading award, and Zach's favorite, a music award! Aside from academics, Zach has an undeniable love for music that he inherited from his parents. Marne minored in music when she was in college, and Steve has always enjoyed listening to a variety of musical genres. She and Steve have taken Zach to multiple concerts to expose him to different artists and bands. Zach has tried just about every instrument and ultimately fell in love with the drums. Thankfully Bulloch Academy has an exceptional music program and Zach was able to learn the basics of multiple instruments. He is also taking drum lessons at a local music store. His teacher can't help but gush over how wonderful of a student Zach is. He is enthusiastic to learn and every time he comes home after a lesson, his parents simultaneously tell him to "go make some noise!"

Being able to attend Bulloch Academy for his entire academic career thus far has alleviated so many potential problems. And since Zach has attended Bulloch Academy since Pre-K, he has made true, genuine friendships. He looks forward to seeing his friends every day and playing frisbee during P.E. He is confident in the classroom and pushes himself to be the best student he can be. Zach knows that while it may take him longer to understand certain tasks or emotions, he can do anything he puts his mind to.

“I have tearful moments every year when we receive the acceptance letter from AAA,” says Marne Thompson. “From the bottom of my heart, I thank you. I encourage you to reach out to friends, family and business partners to educate them about this wonderful foundation. All children deserve the right to receive a quality education regardless of his or her parent(s)’ income. To all of the AAA Scholarship donors that make this possible for my son, I thank you.”

### **About AAA Scholarship Foundation**

The AAA Scholarship Foundation awards scholarships solely to qualifying low-income, disabled and/or displaced students. The typical AAA Scholarship student is an ethnic minority living with a struggling single parent/caregiver in a high crime community. More than 90.6 percent of AAA scholarships are distributed to children at or below 200 percent of poverty. Many children are either below grade level, failing at their previous school or both when they receive a scholarship. Parents, who find their children in these circumstances and are concerned about their future, look for viable options. They seek an atmosphere that challenges their child and will reverse inadequate learning, social patterns and the potential lifelong negative impact. They wish to change their child’s learning environment, acquaintances and the unfortunate predictable outcomes associated with school failure.

AAA Scholarships are funded in Arizona, Florida, Georgia and Nevada by corporations that redirect a portion of their state tax liability to the AAA Scholarship Foundation in exchange for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. The AAA Scholarship Foundation is one of the only approved 501(c)(3) nonprofit scholarship organizations exclusively serving qualifying low-income, disabled and/or displaced students through these tax credit scholarship programs in multiple states. AAA Scholarship Foundation provides your company with the convenience and efficiency of a single-solution for participating in multiple state tax credit scholarship programs. For more information, or to learn how your corporation can participate in the program, visit [www.AAAScholarships.org](http://www.AAAScholarships.org), or contact Kerri Vaughan at [kerri@aaascholarships.org](mailto:kerri@aaascholarships.org) or 888 707-2465 ext. 730.