

**ACHIEVEMENT FIRST EAST NEW YORK CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

JUNE 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Achievement First East New York Charter School is an elementary/middle school serving approximately 582 students (422 in kindergarten through grade four, and 160 in grades five and six) in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ It has plans to grow to serve students in kindergarten through grade twelve.² It is currently housed in two separate NYC DOE facilities in District 19, with the elementary academy at 557 Pennsylvania Avenue and the middle grades academy at 158 Richmond Street.³

The school population comprises 90% Black, 9% Hispanic, <1% White, <1% American Indian/Alaska native and <1% Asian students.⁴ 79.9% of students are designated as Title I, compared to 79.6% in the district.⁵ The student body includes, at the elementary academy, 1% English language learners (ELL) and 10% special education students (SPED), and at the middle academy, 0.6% English language learners and 10% special education students,⁶ compared to district averages of 12.8% designated as ELL and 14.4% receiving SPED services.⁷

The school earned a “C” on its 2009-2010 Progress Report⁸ and an accountability designation of “In Good Standing” on its 2009-2010 New York State School Report Card.⁹ The average attendance rate for the 2010-2011 school year was 96.3% at the elementary academy and 93% at the middle academy.¹⁰

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter Schools Office conducts an annual site visit of New York City Department of Education authorized charter schools in order to assess three primary questions: is the school an academic success; is the school a viable organization; and is the school in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The visits are conducted by representatives of the New York City Department of Education Charter Schools Office and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the principal and school leadership team. Subsequently, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators, teachers, and students. Areas of evaluation include, but are not limited to: academic goals and mission; curriculum and instruction; school culture and learning environment; assessment utilization; parent engagement; government structures and organizational design; community support; special populations; and safety and security.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on June 14, 2011:

- Sonya Hooks, Senior Director, NYC DOE Charter Schools Office
- Sonia Park, Senior Director, NYC DOE Charter Schools Office
- Jessica Fredston-Hermann, Analyst, NYC DOE Charter Schools Office
- Karen Drezner, Consultant

¹ NYC DOE ATS system

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ Self-reported by school on August 24, 2011

⁵ Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System on June 30, 2011

⁶ Self-reported by school

⁷ NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

⁸ NYC DOE School Progress Report

⁹ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

¹⁰ Self-reported by school on June 1, 2011

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- The school has developed Data Driven Instruction.
 - A range of school-wide, grade level and classroom assessments is administered.
 - Achievement First interim assessments
 - New York State assessments
 - Classroom level exit tickets, Fountas and Pinnell running records, quizzes, etc.
 - School leaders analyze data trends, identify weaknesses and use information to guide planning.
 - Friday professional development sessions have integrated data days.
 - Individual teacher coaching frequently focuses on data review and instructional planning.
 - Skills and concepts assessed on interims frame the scope and sequence for the ELA and math content areas.
 - Results of interim assessments in ELA and math, as well as growth in reading levels and daily/weekly tracking of minutes spent reading independently, are posted in elementary classrooms.
 - Teachers at the middle school described the double- and triple-scoring of interim assessments and aligning types of feedback provided on student writing as two norming efforts at the school, and interim assessment refinements on the network level involving strong planners from schools guiding the transition to Common Core Standards.
- The school focuses on teacher growth by having established systems to support teacher learning and continual evolution of instructional practice.
 - Academic coaches provide individualized support and guidance to teachers on a weekly basis.
 - Friday afternoon professional development sessions prioritized a focus on teaching techniques grounded in best practices. Leadership referenced Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion* taxonomy in their PD planning.
 - Achievement First has established leadership development paths for teachers, and Achievement First East New York has grade level leaders and instructional leaders who have participated in the leadership fellows program.
 - Informal observations occur and feedback is provided.
- There is a culture of teacher collaboration and voice.
 - At the elementary level:
 - Grade level teacher teams share responsibilities for instructional planning. While the most experienced teachers take the lead, all teachers plan for guided reading groups.
 - Teachers reported holding each other highly accountable and appreciating the increase in quality and level of detail with lessons this year.
 - Team planning is documented on BetterLesson.
 - Evolution of systems employed at school reflects teacher suggestions, as well as observed or vocalized challenges.
 - At the middle school level, teachers described increased time spent on lesson planning and execution.

- Rituals, routines and protocols to support a positive and safe school culture have been implemented at both the elementary and middle school sites.
 - Both sites align messaging around character-building to Achievement First's REACH values.
 - Middle school students are involved in afterschool activities such as drama, computer club, dance, choir and spoken word, which are all teacher-run.
 - At the elementary school, 3rd and 4th grade students earn "wolf" tickets and can apply to be in the honor society.
 - At the middle school level, students can earn Scholar Dollars daily and "Super Reader" t-shirts monthly.
- Strong systems exist for parent communication.
 - Parent Leadership Councils (PLCs) are established at both the elementary and middle school sites. At the middle school, they have established committee leads who meet with the principal once a week. PLC meetings occur once a month, with approximately 60 parents attending on average.
 - Parents are expected to sign off on daily reading and behavior logs.
 - A number of parent workshops have been offered at both sites. 108 parents attended the most recent workshop at the elementary school.
 - Family chats, involving contract-signing, are scheduled for all newly enrolled students' families.

Areas of Growth

- The school should increase instructional rigor and academic expectations.
 - Clearly define what rigor and hard work look, sound and feel like, both for staff and students.
 - Authentic student work posted in hallways was of varying quality and had obvious written teacher corrections. These appeared to be celebrated and referenced as exemplars (e.g., were in the "100's Club").
 - Visual anchors were available to students related to active lessons, i.e., graphic organizers, guiding worksheets and teacher modeling utilizing the Elmo projector or Smart Board. However, classrooms lacked references to support independent learning and working, such as word walls, charts reflecting skills or concepts taught and authentic student work.
- Student engagement in learning could be improved.
 - Students were on task and engaged in learning at the middle school.
 - At the elementary school:
 - During this visit approximately 1/3 to 1/2 of students in several classrooms were not engaged in rigorous work and/or were demonstrating off-task behaviors, such as passing notes, talking with peers, tossing pencils and sleeping.
 - Although some consistent references to school-wide discipline systems and behavioral expectations were posted (SLANT, number/color cards), they were not actively utilized by all teachers.
 - Some teachers were observed utilizing some common language and strategies (tracking, timer, echo-clapping), but rarely expected, waited for, or maintained 100% compliance.
- Differentiation methods employed by the school can be refined for better student learning outcomes.
 - At the elementary academy:
 - 4-6 leveled guided reading groups are being implemented in each classroom daily; however, some students struggled to work or read independently and other students were in need of additional challenges.

- The school employs a co-teaching model, with two teachers in each classroom and one CTT class on each grade level, with a general education and special education teacher team in place. The implementation of the co-teaching approach needs significant refinement to best support diverse learners.
- The school should focus on ensuring better vertical alignment between the elementary and middle academies.
 - A good amount of informal horizontal information sharing and collaboration was described by school leaders and teachers (e.g., between Deans, Ops Directors), but more focus on vertical alignments, both at the elementary and middle school levels, and between the two academies, would support improvements in culture, academic planning, communication and consistency.
 - A number of missed opportunities appear to exist in terms of sharing best practices and developing seamless systems to ensure the academic and social success of all Achievement First East New York students over time.
- The school should continue documented outreach to English language learners in order to match district averages.
 - The school's elementary population includes 1% ELL students, which is lower than the district average of 12.8%.
 - The school's middle school population includes 0.6% ELL students, which is lower than the district average of 12.8%.

Part 3: Framing Questions

FRAMING QUESTIONS:

Throughout the Renewal Process and the life of each school's charter, the NYCDOE Charter Schools Office uses the following framing questions to monitor Charter School success:

1. Has the School Been an Academic Success?
2. Has the School Been a Viable Organization?
3. Has the School Been in Compliance with All Applicable Laws and Regulations?

Annual Site Visit Rubric:

1. Has the School Been an Academic Success?
 - Academic Goals and Mission
 - School components and curriculum align together and holistically support the mission
 - School has high academic expectations and employs strategies for the full range of students served by the school, including those at risk and those with special needs
 - Curriculum and Instruction
 - The educational plan is flexible and is adjusted to meet the performance levels and learning needs of all enrolled students
 - School implements programming to address the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs
 - Teachers demonstrate the use of differentiated instructional techniques to support the varying ways by which students learn
 - School has implemented programming for students who need remediation or acceleration
 - School Culture
 - The culture is strong, intentional, supportive and sustainable and promotes student learning
 - The school motivates all students and respects the diversity of learners and cultures in the community
 - School offers programs, activities or support services beyond academics to address students' social and emotional needs
 - School calendar and day are set to provide extra supports to ensure that students are able to meet and exceed academic goals
 - Schedule for communication to parents/students is timely and allows for due process, includes strategies to prepare students for transitions and strategies for those students who are not on schedule, presents a clear and fair system that complies with students' due process rights
 - Structures that foster the development of authentic, sustained, caring, respectful relationships among all stakeholders within school
 - Behavioral expectations and social supports that reflect the school's mission and comply with all applicable laws and regulations
 - Assessment
 - Establishes a culture of continuous improvement and accountability for student learning
 - Develops assessments that shape and inform instruction on an ongoing basis and develop data that's used to gauge student, teacher and school progress through formative and summative assessment
 - Student learning measured with multiple forms of assessments/metrics
 - Develops educational goals and performance metrics that are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reflect the Mission and Time-Specific

- Develops assessments that are appropriately aligned with curriculum, instruction, and adopted standards
 - Provides evidence of how data will influence instruction, professional development and curricular adjustments
 - Parent Engagement
 - Parent engagement strategies that integrate and mobilize parents within the school community as conduits for student success
 - Capacity to communicate effectively with parents and families
2. Is the School a Viable Organization
- Governance Structures and Organizational Design
 - School has articulated appropriate roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structure for school community members (including Board of Trustees and school leadership)
 - An accountability structure that provides effective oversight of the educational program and fiscal components of the school is in place and utilized
 - Board regularly reviews a data dashboard of student achievement and fiscal management that forms the basis for Board discussions and decisions
 - Board has diverse skill set that lends itself to strong educational / operational oversight
 - Board has an articulated process for ongoing policy development, Board member development and self-evaluation
 - Organizational charts are aligned with mission; roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
 - Board has developed essential strategic partnerships with organizations that support the mission of the school
 - Community Support
 - School Leadership demonstrated responsiveness to the unique needs and interests of the community to be served
 - School has established a presence in the community and has buy in from community members
3. Is the School in Compliance with Applicable Laws and Regulations
- Special Populations
 - Well-defined plan and sufficient capacity to service the learning needs of Special Education students, English Language Learners
 - School adequately addresses the academic and non academic needs of students in need of remediation, students with disabilities, students with interrupted formal education, and gifted students
 - There is a coherent plan for meeting the non-academic needs of students with disabilities, students with interrupted formal education, and other populations
 - School employs a process to identify students at risk of not meeting expectations and creates intervention plans and follow up
 - School demonstrates a comprehensive recruitment, enrollment and retention approach that is sensitive to the diverse needs of students
 - School admission policy and lottery preferences serve to create a student body that reflects community demographics and give a preference to community school district residents
 - Safety and Security
 - School is well maintained
 - Transitions and student gatherings are orderly and well supervised
 - Expectations for student behavior are well known and are enforced fairly
 - School is current with all safety recruitments and drills.
 - AED machines are in operation and school staff is trained in CPR