

HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
2007 School Design Specifications: Achievement First Hartford (AF Hartford)

Overview of School Model

- School type, accreditation & affiliations, theme/content focus, grade configuration, size, major school partner(s)

**What is Achievement First?**

Achievement First (AF) is a highly-acclaimed, non-profit public charter school organization. AF developed and supports two Connecticut-based Achievement First Schools: New Haven's Amistad Academy and Elm City College Prep, as well as AF schools in Brooklyn, New York that have demonstrated high achievement records with its diverse, urban student populations. The Achievement First school model continues to develop and draw from best practices from other outstanding urban schools around the country including KIPP Academy in the Bronx and in Houston, Boston Collegiate and Roxbury Prep in Boston, and Milwaukee College Prep in Milwaukee. AF also developed from an initial grade five - eight model to a K-12 pathway.

**Achievement First in Hartford**

Achievement First will open its first K-eight school in Hartford: **AF Hartford**. The central mission of AF Hartford will be an intentional pursuit of academic excellence. The school will purposefully not have a single theme or subject area as a focus. Instead, the goal will be to ensure that AF Hartford students are well-rounded and well-prepared in all subject areas and develop a strong character in order to be successful in high school, college and life. This mission will be achieved with an extremely rigorous curriculum and the uncompromising pursuit of mastery in all subject areas.

AF Hartford will begin with Kindergarten, first grade and fifth grade in its first year, and will grow a grade every year to eventually serve 730 students in grades K-eight. This will enable elementary students to master basic skills (reading, writing, and math) and prepare middle school students with the advanced knowledge and skills they will need for success in high school and college. Each grade at AF Hartford will have no more than 84 and no fewer than 70 students per grade, divided into three classes of approximately 25 students each (our target per-grade enrollment is 75-85). All children will be Hartford school children chosen through the choice application process. Open slots will be filled with students from a waiting list based on the aforesaid process. AF Hartford may admit larger classes in the earlier grades to allow for some attrition in the older grades, and may choose to have grades in which the enrollment is slightly greater or less than 75. When the first class of students reaches eighth grade, an AF Hartford High School will open.

**Achievement First Support Network**

As a member school of the Achievement First network, AF Hartford will develop active and ongoing partnerships with the other schools, staff members, and leadership teams across the Achievement First network. Drawing on the model, best practices, and organizational capacity of existing Achievement First schools, AF Hartford will have access to some of the finest educational materials systems and will interface with many of the finest educators in the country. AF Hartford will also be supported by the Achievement First Home Office, which provides curriculum, operations and IT support, fundraising, leadership coaching, talent recruitment and development, and ad hoc special projects consulting on a contractual basis. In addition, AF Hartford will be part of an informal network of the nation's highest performing charter schools and charter management organizations, including KIPP, Uncommon Schools and others.

**Partnerships**

Of equal importance is the proposed school's partnership with CREC, the Capitol Region Education

Council. Since 1966, CREC, working with and for its member districts, has developed a wide array of cost-effective and high-quality programs and services to meet the educational needs of children and adults in the Capitol Region. CREC and Achievement First are tremendously excited to be partnering on a joint-venture to bring another high-caliber K-12 education program to Hartford. CREC's leadership will provide guidance and support, as well as programmatic support to the new school as it grows into the fabric of the Hartford education system to provide a model of success for other education providers.

A vital partner for AF Hartford will be Hartford Public Schools, which will provide a building and the funding to ensure equity based on the gap between the per pupil Charter funds from the State and the district's proposed Student-Based Budgeting allotment. Achievement First is dedicated to providing a unique choice option for Hartford students in alignment with the Hartford All-Choice System of Schools plan.

#### School Mission & Vision

- School purpose

The primary mission of AF Hartford is to provide a rigorous academic environment in which all students achieve excellence. Excuses will not be tolerated. Mediocrity will not be good enough. AF Hartford will ensure that students will gain the critical skills and knowledge to excel in high school, college, and the competitive world beyond. Some AF Hartford graduates will enter elite high schools, but we also hope to open an Achievement First high school program to serve our AF Hartford middle school alumni (similar to what we have done by founding Amistad's high school program in New Haven). The school is aligned with the Hartford Public Schools' mission that all HPS students will be ready for post-secondary education, and our goal is for all AF Hartford graduates to go on to graduate from four-year colleges.

#### Character Development

The second mission of AF Hartford is to foster positive character development. Success in both school and life will demand brainpower, sophisticated social skills, and a commitment to honorable values. AF Hartford students will not just develop as intellectuals, but also as responsible citizens. The goal is for AF Hartford students to do "well" and do "good." Students will become critical thinkers and creative problem-solvers. They will learn to work effectively in teams and develop a deep sense of social responsibility. By adopting Achievement First schools' REACH values (Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, Hard Work), AF Hartford will prepare students to become leaders and to give back to their families and communities.

#### Governance Structure

- Leadership model, decision-making approach, school council role, school compact

#### AF Hartford Governing Board

The AF Hartford governing board was established in May 2007. The core of the Board is comprised of CREC, Hartford community leaders, and representation from the Hartford Board of Education. The board will also include a teacher representative, elected by the teachers, and a parent representative, elected by parents. The board consists of people from a range of careers and backgrounds, and contains excellent professionals from the fields of education, business, finance, law and government.

AF Hartford, an independent nonprofit as required by charter law, holds the charter and is solely responsible for the operation of the school. Achievement First is a nonprofit charter school management organization, with which AF Hartford contracts for management services. These services include staff and student recruitment, teacher and leadership training, operations support, fundraising, reporting and all budgeting and financial services.

### **School Leadership**

Each division of the school (elementary, middle, and high) will have a separate principal and will be referred to as an academy. Achievement First is responsible for recruiting and nominating candidates to be the school leaders for each academy. Final selections for principal candidates will come before the full AF Hartford Board of Directors. The AF Hartford board will hold final authority over the hiring and firing of the school's executive director (principal) and will be responsible for renewing his/her contract on an annual basis based on the recommendation of AF. Yearly, the Board will work with Achievement First leadership to ensure that a thorough evaluation of the school leader is completed. Since the Principal works at AF Hartford on a yearly contract, those Principals deemed by Achievement First and the Board to have successfully led the school will be offered contracts for the next school year. The Principal will be the decision-maker for his or her academy, and each Principal will supervise an Academic Dean and Dean of Students; these three leaders (Principal, Dean of Students, Academic Dean) will supervise all teachers in the division, though the Principal will have final authority over the employment and supervision of all staff.

Despite this contractual relationship with Achievement First, AF Hartford's Board of Directors retains full and sole accountability for the school's operations, and the elementary and middle school principals of the school will be accountable to the AF Hartford board. The State Department of Education maintains regular contact with the school's co-Executive Directors – the elementary and middle school principals – regarding the school's day-to-day activities or when other issues arise. The AF Hartford Board of Directors will have ultimate authority on school issues, and it will set all school policies. It will, with Achievement First's consultation and leadership, provide support to the school in three areas of accountability and capacity-building:

#### Oversight

1. Mission and Vision – Set organizational goals and engage in strategic planning
2. Program – Approve operating policies that comply with the provisions of the charter, laws, and regulations
3. Management – Evaluate the charter management organization
4. Finances – Review and approve annual budgets, review periodic budgets, ensure timely audits and adequate financial controls
5. Contracts – Act as the negotiating party in approving and ensuring the compliance of major contracts

#### Resource Development

1. Expertise and Personnel – Provide expertise in areas such as law, business, finance, and educational programming
2. Fundraising – Raise capital and operating funds and solicit in-kind donations

#### Publicity and Advocacy

1. Credibility – Establish and maintain the school's reputation
2. Visibility – Enhance school's visibility in the community at large, the education community and the news media
3. Support – Garner support from other organizations, individuals, and government agencies AF

In addition, Hartford Public Schools will monitor AF Hartford's achievement progress, as it will of all its incubated schools via the annual OSI score (Overall School Index). The district will not continue to commit resources (building, student dollars) to the school if it fails to meet proficiency levels as measured by the OSI over a two-year period.

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| Student Body  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student profile, student roles and responsibility, homework expectations, student voice and leadership</li> </ul>  |
| <p>AF Hartford will be located within the City of Hartford and will serve students residing within the city limits. Hartford schools serve a predominantly Black and Hispanic population. AF Hartford, through door-to-door canvassing and the choice application process, will serve a cross-section of Hartford’s school-aged population, thus mirroring a population that is on average 97% low-income and 87% minority. The school is open to all students, irrespective of language and special education status, and AF Hartford will dedicate itself to ensure all students are successful.</p> <p>Students must feel they have a personal investment in the school community and that the adults around them are working both for and with them. To that end, AF Hartford will be organized into advisory groups, and each student will have two advisors who are charged with ensuring the concerns and needs of each student are being met. Students will present frequently at PLC and Board of Directors meetings, and students will serve as tour guides and ambassadors for school visitors. Older students will earn the privilege of tutoring younger students, and all graduating students will complete an exit interview that highlights areas of personal growth and challenges as well as school strengths and weaknesses; all graduating eighth graders will meet with their parents, committee of teachers and administrators for their exit interviews.</p>   |
| Parental Role   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parent commitment, opportunities for parents, parent voice</li> </ul> <p>Parents play a critical support role in the school, even before the first day of school. Parents, students and teachers are brought together to sign a compact that outlines their shared commitment to hard work and consistent support of one another. Our staff pledges to offer a high-quality education, to demonstrate the highest standards of professionalism, and to appreciate, respect and support every student and parent. We expect parent support in promoting academic success and positive behavior. While parental and student compacts are not legally binding, they set clear expectations and a high bar for all parties from the start. Please see the parent’s portion of the compact below:</p> <p><b><u>Parent’s / Guardian’s Commitment</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><i>Timeliness/Attendance</i></b> – I understand that every school day is important and that it is my responsibility to get my child to school every day on time (7:30 a.m.). If my child takes the bus, I will make sure he or she is at the bus stop on time. If my child is picked up from school, I will make sure that I or a responsible, approved adult is there on time each day to pick my child up. If my child needs to miss school, I will contact the school. I will also make sure my child attends Summer Academy, and I will never schedule family vacations during school time.</li> <li>2. <b><i>Support &amp; Homework</i></b> – I will always help my child in the best way I know how, and I will do whatever it takes for my child to learn. I will provide a quiet space for my child to study and, if necessary, I will check my child’s homework every night. If my middle school child struggles with homework and is required to attend after-school Homework Club, I will arrange for transportation home at 6:00 p.m.</li> <li>3. <b><i>Independent Reading</i></b> – I will insist that my child reads for at least 20 minutes a night (including all three days of the weekend), and I will never sign the reading log unless I have personally seen my child read.</li> </ol> |

4. **Communication** – I will make myself available to my child and all of his/her teachers. I will return phone calls from school staff within 24 hours. If I am asked to attend a meeting regarding my child’s education or behavior, I will be there. I will read all updates and memos sent home by the school, and I will return all necessary information immediately.
5. **Uniform** – I will send my child to school every day in the Achievement First uniform.
6. **REACH and School Rules** – I understand Achievement First’s REACH values, and I will make sure that my child learns to live up to them. I understand that my child must follow these rules to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals. I fully understand that Achievement First is a “sweat the small stuff” environment, and I also understand that my child may lose privileges or have other disciplinary consequences if my child violates the REACH values. I will support the school in its efforts to enforce high standards for behavior and citizenship.
7. **Attendance at Parent Meetings:** I will attend all required parent meetings, including Back-to-School Night and two Report Card Nights during the school year.

AF Hartford parents will form a Parent Leadership Council (PLC). The PLC will, in concert with the school principals, identify three to five projects to complete over the year. These projects will be based on clear, identifiable needs of the school. They could include, but are not limited to, coordinating events that bring the school community together, arranging speakers, developing parent education courses, or recruiting tutors. The PLC will also have an important role to play in supporting parents in upholding their part of the AF Hartford teacher-parent-student compact.

#### Teacher Capacity

- Pre-certification and training, professional development, collaborative planning process, C&I expectations & roles such as joint interdisciplinary unit development & team teaching

Recruiting, developing, and retaining exceptional educators is a primary focus of Achievement First’s Talent Development Team and is one of the services that Achievement First provides to AF Hartford. Achievement First and CREC will partner to ensure that the applicant talent pool is sufficiently deep to ensure that every AF Hartford classroom is staffed by a top-notch educator. Once Achievement First has narrowed down the number of appropriate and qualified candidates, AF Hartford’s principals ultimately make the final selections. The quality of our teachers will be the prime variable dictating our success and Achievement First will devote significant time and resources on teacher development and retention. AF Hartford will select intelligent, passionate teachers who are strong classroom managers and believe that all students can – and must – succeed at high levels.

In order to attract the finest candidates, AF Hartford will extend a broad net to attract applicants, through CREC and Achievement First’s recruitment infrastructures. In order to hire a faculty that reflects the diversity of the student body, we will recruit heavily to ensure a large number of applicants who are teachers of color. AF Hartford will use the following sources to help locate great talent:

- **Achievement First Schools’ staff:** Since Achievement First schools already have great people, the best source for other great people is often that staff. We plan to seed AF Hartford with one or more talented teachers from other Achievement First schools.
- **CREC’s** recruitment and professional development programs and resources.
- **Hartford Public Schools’ teacher recruitment activities:** AF Hartford will participate in all Hartford teacher recruitment activities, including job fairs.

- **Notices to colleges and universities:** AF Hartford will inform the career service offices at many prestigious colleges and use a national database for career service offices to list openings at all Achievement First schools.
- **Teach for America:** AF Hartford will actively use the recruiting tool of this great organization to find top candidates. In particular, we will continue to leverage our relationship with TFA Connecticut to attract top teachers with experience in urban schools to our program.
- **Web site advertisements:** AF Hartford will advertise openings on many Web sites. Currently, we use the following sites: CT REAP, Center for Ed Reform, Klingenstein Center, Monster.com, JobTrak, Project Connect, Education America. We will continue to post our jobs on additional sites as they are identified.
- **The Achievement First Web site:** AF Hartford will post job openings on the Achievement First site, [www.achievementfirst.org](http://www.achievementfirst.org), where prospective candidates can use an online application to apply for positions in AF schools.

During the 2005-2006 school year, Achievement First received more than 4,000 resumes for just 95 teacher spots in ten academies. As we continue to build our talent recruitment and talent development practices, we are ever more certain that we will strengthen and diversify our applicant pool.

Teacher candidates will be hired on the basis of the following criteria:

- Demonstrated commitment to academic excellence and high standards – for themselves and their students
- Strong fit with and dedication to AF Hartford’s culture and values
- Observation of a sample lesson conducted in an AF classroom setting
- Demonstrated subject area expertise
- Past performance as a teacher, especially in urban areas
- College degrees, advanced degrees and certification
- Other relevant experience
- Recommendations from prior employers (and in some cases, students)

### **Teachers and Junior Teachers**

For kindergarten and first grade, we plan to have two teachers in the classroom. One of these teachers will be a certified, veteran teacher. The other will be a “junior teacher.” The junior teacher typically will have less than two years of teaching experience; this junior teacher will have a B.A. degree and be either certified or working toward certification. The junior teacher replaces the paraprofessional found in many schools. In grades two-eight, we will have student-teacher ratios of approximately 12 to one. Class size will range from 10 to 25 depending on the class (music and PE classes may be larger). This ratio means that AF Hartford will have approximately seven teachers with its initial cohort of 84 students, and when the school reaches its capacity of 730 students, we will have 61 teachers. In addition to these teachers, we will have up to four paraprofessionals. (The number of part-time paraprofessionals will be largely based on the special education needs of our students.)

### **Ongoing Teacher Training**

AF Hartford will go to great lengths to recruit a team of talented teachers who will be trained in best practices instruction. AF Hartford teachers will be given two weeks of training in August before school opens and they will have 13 professional development days during the year, more than quadruple the normal number. On top of exceptional skills, all AF Hartford teachers will make a commitment to going the extra mile for all students. The atmosphere at AF Hartford will be one of constant growth among both students and teachers.

Every Friday, teachers will have a half day allotted for planning or meetings. During scheduled meeting times, teachers will be able to work with the school principals to suggest and implement programmatic changes and address areas of school need. Moreover, teachers will be grouped into grade level teams with common planning times. These grade level teams will be charged with discussing students who have present academic or behavioral concerns, and they will also organize grade level field trips, incentives, and activities. Once a year, the school will hold a mid-year staff retreat in which teachers will, through a structured reflection process, help to identify the strengths and challenges of the school. Working from the ideas generated at the retreat, the teachers and principal will draft a school improvement plan for the following school year.

### **Teacher Accountability for Student Results**

AF Hartford teachers will use periodic, standards-aligned assessments, given every six weeks (five times per year) to track individual student progress toward mastery of each standard in all core content areas (Reading, Writing, Math, Science, History, Technology, and Spanish). By systematically using individual student data, instruction can be targeted to better meet individual student needs and to better identify standards that need to be re-taught to the whole class, those that need to be re-taught to small groups of students who have struggled with particular concepts, as well as to identify students who need intensive one-on-one tutoring. In addition, teachers will meet periodically in grade-level and subject-area teams, using the student performance data as a basis for discussion, to share successes, challenges, teaching strategies, and instructional resources. As such, instruction at AF Hartford will be strategic. Teachers will not simply work to cover content; rather, they will assess student needs and target instruction to address specific deficiencies so that all students reach mastery on all standards.

AF Hartford will not be a set of isolated and idiosyncratic classrooms, defined by the styles or skill sets of individual teachers. AF Hartford will be an instructional model, supported by the skills and insights of a talented team of teachers. Across every classroom, there will be common curricula, strategies, systems, and templates. Such consistency greatly aids the learning process of students, the professional development of teachers, and the refining of proven instructional practices. For example, AF Hartford will commit a significant proportion of instruction to systematic cumulative review. During class, teachers will constantly revisit skills learned earlier in the year, and most homework will involve systematic cumulative review. Even though math students might have mastered adding decimals at the beginning of the school year, they still practice and remember how to add decimals in March. In doing so, teachers are developing the fluency of students to perform skills clearly outlined in the various curricula. With repeated practice and cumulative review, teachers help students to maintain learned skills and look for opportunities to apply them in new settings.

### **Curriculum & Instruction**

- Pedagogical approach, curriculum design, learning environment & classroom design, field trips & extended classrooms, language requirements, technology

Our academic program starts with Connecticut's rigorous state standards, which form the backbone of our rich,

college preparatory curriculum. Teachers do not simply “cover” material; they work toward real student mastery and comprehension, making our students competitive with the top suburban districts. Achievement First has created top-quality standards-aligned materials (e.g. math practice, grammar practice, novel units) that teachers in grades three to eight will use in the classroom. For grades K-two, we will supplement standards-based, research-proven curricula with practice materials that are directly aligned to the Connecticut state standards.

### **Early Literacy**

Teaching students to read well is the critical task of elementary and middle schools. AF Hartford will build on the latest research in literacy education to create a rigorous program in which all students are fluent readers by the end of the second grade. Beyond the second grade, we will develop students who are able to rigorously analyze text using explicit comprehension strategies. Our overall program is based on the five components of excellent reading outlined by the federal government: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

### **Reading Instruction**

In grades K-two, we will “overwhelm the problem” of early literacy by providing over three hours of language arts instruction daily. Students who need remediation will go through an intensive six weeks of using the Literacy Links or SRA intervention program. Literacy Links is a highly effective program that directly teaches sound-symbol relationships and gives both students and teachers the language and knowledge necessary for success in later reading. Building on Literacy Links, students will then spend 20 minutes a day in individualized, computer-based instruction using the Waterford Early Reading Program. Developed over 20 years and costing more than \$30 million, this program has had dramatic success making up for the over 3000 hours of literacy experiences that most urban students have missed before they enter school. Finally, Reading Mastery will serve as the core instructional program. Reading Mastery provides a balanced literacy approach while directly teaching sound-symbol relationships and includes ample practice with phonemic awareness and phonics. Both programs have an extensive research base with dramatic success rates in both urban and suburban contexts. In addition, middle school students with decoding needs will receive the Corrective Reading Decoding program, which has been enormously successful at closing the phonics gaps that many middle school students still have.

Once students have mastered phonemic awareness and phonics, it is essential that they read fluently. That is, the rate and accuracy with which they read must be solid. In order to ensure that all of our students are fluent readers, AF Hartford will give a fluency test to all entering students in grades three and above. Those students who need fluency practice will receive instruction using the Corrective Reading Decoding program. Many of our entering fifth graders in the first year will need this supplemental decoding instruction to close the gaps that remain in their phonics skills. The SRA Corrective Reading Decoding program has been used with great success at Amistad Academy, Elm City College Prep and other highly successful urban schools; the program is designed to, in a two-year sequence, take students from the third to eighth grade levels in reading fluency.

### **Vocabulary**

Embedded in the Reading Mastery, Guided Reading, and Waterford programs are strong vocabulary strands, and AF Hartford teachers will use these programs to build the vocabulary skills of our students. At the middle school level, all teachers will highlight and explain vocabulary words as they arise in the text that students are reading. They will also teach students important vocabulary in context skills so that students are able to use context clues to figure out by themselves what an unknown word means. As a supplement to this more organic vocabulary instruction, all middle school teachers will use Worldly Wise 3000 as a basis for ten minutes of explicit vocabulary instruction/day during reading class.

### **Independent Reading**

Beginning in second grade, all AF Hartford students will have a 20-30 minute independent reading class during which each teacher will work to get all of his or her students to be avid, active readers. It is the job of the reading teacher to find appropriate books, inspire students to read, and monitor their independent reading. This in-school

independent reading will be supplemented with 20 minutes of required independent reading at home. The student will complete an independent reading journal, and a parent/guardian is required to sign off on the child's reading log indicating that they supervised the reading.

### **Comprehension Skills**

While working to build fluent readers, AF Hartford teachers will also focus on developing strong comprehension skills. For the elementary students, the Guided Reading, Reading Mastery, and Waterford programs all have very strong comprehension strands that align to state and national standards. At the middle school level, AF Hartford teachers will build student comprehension skills through the study of literature (each grade level reads a mix of fiction and non-fiction). Teachers will systematically teach mini-lessons and guide students in the practice of comprehension skills. When AF Hartford teachers teach novels, they will not be teaching *Charlotte's Web* or *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; rather, they will use these texts to teach summarizing, identifying the main idea, figuring out cause-and-effect, and analyzing the author's purpose and craft (all skills in Connecticut's framework). Achievement First has developed a standards-based novel unit creation tool that aids teachers in developing standards-based questions for novels, and completed novel units are available as a resource to teachers through the AF curriculum intranet.

In addition to building comprehension through novels and non-fiction books, students will learn and practice their comprehension skills using a Textual Analysis program that leverages strong standards-aligned mini-lessons with targeted student practice. The program, which was first developed Urban Education Exchange and later modified by Achievement First, includes teacher-developed standard-by-standard resources and mini-lessons to teach each reading skill or strategy (e.g. finding the main idea).

Once the skills have been taught through the mini-lesson, students then practice this newly-acquired skill using short fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and task passages. As part of their practice, students are required to answer questions, and to defend and prove their answers during rich classroom discussions about question types and text proofs, which help build students' analytical skills. Achievement First is in the process of building a seven-year sequence of Textual Analysis passages and questions, the first six of which have already been fully developed. These Textual Analysis resources and practice materials, which have been in use at all of our Achievement First Middle Schools, are now available for AF Hartford teachers to use.

### **Writing Curriculum**

AF Hartford will offer a rigorous writing curriculum that is designed to have students produce writing with excellent organization, elaboration, and flow across multiple genres. Teachers will begin with a heavy focus on sentence structure, basic grammar, and paragraph formation. Students will be expected to complete Daily Oral Language activities to improve their grammar skills, and teachers will use a variety of standards-aligned grammar materials in daily mini-lessons. Moreover, students will learn step-by-step how to write excellent sentences, paragraphs, and essays using templates and teacher modeling until they are confident enough to tackle the task without scaffolding. Extensive prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing will take place on all pieces of writing. Students graduating AF Hartford middle school will be able to produce top-quality narratives, research papers, and expository, persuasive, and literary analysis essays.

### **Social Studies**

It is critically important that students understand their own history, the world in which they live, and the history and culture of many different countries and peoples. K-four social studies curriculum will follow the comprehensive and challenging Core Knowledge Sequence, developed by E.D. Hirsch at the University of Virginia. Hirsch and his team completed a comprehensive analysis of the key information students needed to know to be literate, culturally-aware citizens, and they mapped it in a clear, grade-level specific curriculum.

At the middle school level, this curriculum will be enhanced and directly aligned to Connecticut's state social studies standards. This social studies curriculum will be presented in a way that is engaging and challenging.

and teachers will expect students to master the key concepts and vocabulary while they will teach them to analyze primary sources, debate different points of view, and make cause-and-effect connections. Social studies class will be a fast-paced, multi-modal class in which students hone their non-fiction reading skills, learn important content, and apply it in written essays and oral presentations.

### **Mathematics**

The AF Hartford mathematics program will produce students who have mastered all middle school mathematics standards and Algebra I by the end of eighth grade, and all Calculus standards by the time they graduate from high school. The curriculum was built to help students ascertain the basic facts, knowledge and “automaticity” with procedural computation, coupled with a deep conceptual understanding of mathematics. This combination of basic skills and conceptual understanding will give students the ability to solve complex mathematical application problems. As a means to that end, in grades K-two, students will use Saxon Mathematics, a highly-effective curriculum that gives students an exceptionally strong foundation in the basic skills, procedural computation, and conceptual understanding. Teachers will require students to apply this strong basic skills knowledge in challenging problem-solving situations. AF Hartford will use a problem-solving supplement to Saxon Math, and starting in third grade, students will begin Achievement First’s math curriculum, which mirrors Connecticut’s rigorous standards and requires daily demonstration of problem-solving skills.

In addition, the math lessons will follow a structured lesson plan designed for maximum success. The first 25 minutes of class and all homework assignments will include cumulative review. There will also be daily sections for basic facts review and problem solving. Concepts will be introduced in a set sequence, emphasizing both step-by-step approaches and explanations for all mathematical processes. Math classes will also make extensive use of the rap, rhythm and rhyme techniques pioneered by master math teacher Harriett Ball.

### **Science**

AF Hartford plans to implement the FOSS Science curriculum, which correlates very well to Connecticut and national science standards. In addition, AF has been working in partnership with the Connecticut Academy of Math and Science (CAMS) to develop a rigorous five-eight science curriculum that builds on the FOSS curriculum. CAMS has already done a detailed analysis of the Amistad Academy middle school science curriculum, and our science teachers are working to ensure all Connecticut standards are reflected in the curriculum. Science instruction at AF Hartford will combine student mastery of core vocabulary and conceptual knowledge with the application of scientific principals in laboratory settings. Science assessments, for example, will include sections that focus on the key terms and ideas of a unit as well as a performance task component that will require students to synthesize and analyze data from laboratory experiments. Science teachers will also actively work to reinforce key mathematical concepts, especially graphing and measurement skills.

### **Physical Education**

AF Hartford’s physical education curriculum will reflect the belief that a fit and healthy lifestyle is important for learning and life. Elementary and middle school physical education teachers will use the CATCH-PE curriculum; this curriculum uses continual motion and P.E. games to build athletic skills and an appreciation for lifelong fitness. In addition, they will also teach students how to play a variety of different sports, as well as reinforcing messages about nutrition, teamwork and fair play. Starting in the second year of the middle school, AF Hartford students will have the opportunity to play on competitive sports teams.

### **World Languages**

All AF Hartford students will be fluent in Spanish by the time they graduate from high school. Those students rising up through AF Hartford’s elementary program will receive intensive Spanish language instruction, which will begin in grades seven and eight, at the latest. This instruction will be the equivalent of a typical high school Spanish I course. Students will take four years of Spanish in high school, culminating with the AP Spanish examination. We are also piloting a program at Amistad Academy Elementary School to commence world

language instruction in first grade.

**Music**

Starting in kindergarten, all AF Hartford students will have music instruction that is aligned to the Connecticut and national standards for music education. Over the course of their time at AF Hartford, students will learn to play an instrument and read music. Middle school students will have the option of participating in a school orchestra.

**Technology**

Students need to be technologically literate to compete in today’s competitive global economy; students need to know how to use the computer in the ways that most professionals use daily. We also believe that the computer can be an instructional aid. All students will receive explicit instruction in basic typing skills, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Explorer, and Outlook. By the time they graduate, students will be able to proficiently use these programs; they will be technologically literate. As mentioned previously, technology will also be used to aide in reading instruction.

***I-WE-YOU* Approach**

Perhaps the most powerful pedagogical strategy AF Hartford teachers will use is the consistent, clear modeling of both new behaviors and new academic skills. In doing so, AF Hartford teachers will I-WE-YOU all new concepts. In the “I” stage, the teacher models the behavioral or academic skill by having students watch while they talk through the new skill step-by-step. They then allow the modeling to shift to the “WE” stage. Teachers might allow the students a chance to talk through each step of similar problems, reinforcing the same skill. Teachers then slowly let students take more and more of a role in solving the skill. Finally, when the teacher is confident that students can handle the task/skill on their own, they move to the “YOU” stage. Teachers then expect silent, independent work by students. The I-WE-YOU process will be used in each class throughout the day. Teachers will constantly I-WE-YOU new behaviors, routines, and skills – the way to pass in papers, compare fractions, write a topic sentence, line up after technology class, or fill in a REACH rubric.

**Community Partnerships**

- Internships, job shadows, mentoring, after-school and weekend programming, job placements, college sponsorships, interdisciplinary community experiences

AF Hartford will be actively engaged with its broader community. We will invite community leaders and role models to visit our school and engage with our students. It is essential that students meet and interact with business leaders, social workers, doctors, engineers, activists, lawyers and other professionals. We also envision AF Hartford students heading into the community for periodic “field lessons.” They will tour local businesses and be exposed to the basics of entrepreneurialism. Students need a picture in their minds, a career goal to work toward, and inspiration that will make them want to put in the effort to prepare for college. They will need mentors and contacts, and these will be all the more powerful if these are people who they can identify with, who look like them, and live next door.

AF Hartford students will also reach out to their neighbors. Since we are committed to helping students become responsible citizens, we will take on several community service projects. AF Hartford students will learn about the needs of their community and volunteer in places where they can make an impact. AF Hartford students will devote time, energy, and enthusiasm to a range of projects. Students may visit the elderly, read to children in daycares, write letters to local agencies, and donate food/clothing to a homeless shelter. Students will work with faculty to identify these projects, organize them and follow through. These activities will not only foster spirit and a sense of civic responsibility, but they will also reinforce academic learning.

**Learning Outcomes & Assessment Design**

- By grade, by grade grouping, readiness for feeder school

All AF Hartford students will complete a series of academic assessments when they first arrive at the school. Students will take reading assessments, chiefly the nationally-normed DRP (Degrees of Reading Power), to gauge general reading level and vocabulary knowledge. They will also take a test of Oral Reading Fluency and reading comprehension. For math, the Stanford nine will be used to establish a baseline. Beginning- and end-of-year administrations of this assessment will allow us to gauge students' growth longitudinally during their time with us.

### **Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT)**

All students at AF Hartford will take the Connecticut Mastery Test every spring (as per the new state schedule) beginning in 2008. Other statewide mastery tests will also be administered as required by state law. Students with special needs will be accommodated during testing, as per the dictates of their PPTs to ensure that all AF Hartford students are assessed, but in an appropriate fashion. We will use incoming students' CMT results (from their previous school) as an additional baseline. This will give us the opportunity to gauge improvement for each year students are at AF Hartford.

### **Interim Assessments**

We believe that an interim assessment system will help teachers keep their eyes on the prize: Student mastery of clear standards. The interim assessments (IAs) are a tool to help teachers strategically use data to inform instructional decisions in order to ensure student mastery. Used school-wide, they will ensure that all students have mastered the material in the curriculum. Cumulative IAs in reading comprehension, writing, editing and revising, math, history, and science will be given every six weeks, and will slowly progress to cover all of the standards in a year. As such, the first IA will be relatively short and the fifth IA will be relatively long.

Achievement First is developing a Web-based Interim Assessment Platform – a tool that will automate assessment scoring through a scanning device. The tool will also systematize and analyze results, and help create a data-driven instructional plan, customized for each teacher. Teachers and school leaders will collaboratively tailor and discuss the plan subsequent to each IA cycle. Teachers reflect on the following questions in advance of their meeting with the principal:

- 1) Which standards has the class mastered – that you can immediately incorporate into homework and other ongoing, cumulative review?
- 2) Which standards warrant more time for whole-class instruction and review?
- 3) Which standards warrant more time for small-group instruction and review? How might you ensure that the small groups of students who need to master these skills have the instruction and practice necessary to master the skills? What will the other students be doing?
- 4) Which students need significantly more help and for which specific skills? What strategies might you use to make sure these students master all the skills?
- 5) Do you need any additional materials or instructional strategies to help you work with students to master the standards covered by this IA? The next IA?

Teachers will leave the performance conferences, therefore, with a firm understanding of which students have mastered what standards and a clear plan for addressing areas of student need.

### **College Readiness**

- Career explorations, Plan of Study, college visits, mentoring programs, dual credit opportunities, AP courses, college advisory, college partnerships, workplace readiness

Since our mission is to prepare students for college, everything we do is in service of high academic achievement. Our instructional program, assessment system, and intervention mechanisms are all designed to make sure that all students do extremely well on the Connecticut Mastery Tests – a chief

means of gauging academic skills needed as a foundation for more advanced work in high school and college.

We also introduce the idea of college as early as possible, by using college banners throughout the school and encouraging students to imagine themselves in college. Students need a picture in their minds, a career goal to work toward, and inspiration that will make them want to climb the mountain to college. They will need mentors and contacts, and these will be all the more powerful if these are people who they can identify with, who look like them, and live next door. To this end, we will use our community partnerships, described in a previous section, to help our students see their path to college more clearly. We will get our students out into the community to visit the wealth of colleges in our midst and to meet with students, professors and admissions officers. College exposure tours are a cornerstone of Amistad's program, and have become a regular practice at all other Achievement First middle schools.

### **School Culture & Climate**

- Code of conduct & behavior expectations, orientation and bridge programs, learning expectations, school uniform

At AF Hartford, we have exceptionally high standards for student conduct. We will not make excuses for our students. From the moment AF Hartford students board their buses and all through the day, they will act in a way that befits an AF Hartford student – respectful of themselves and others. This will not happen magically. It will take enormous planning, teaching, practice and reinforcement of positive behaviors.

At AF Hartford, much of the power of our culture will be rooted in the clarity and consistency of our expectations. Behavior expectations will be common from classroom to classroom. All AF Hartford students will look sharp – in their khaki pants and polo shirts (tucked in). All AF Hartford students will learn and practice common courtesies (please, thank you, and proper greetings). AF Hartford students will also practice good table manners at breakfast and lunch, and learn how to chat quietly with friends. In class, all AF Hartford students will sit at their desks and SLANT (Sit up straight, Listen, Ask/Answer questions, Nod, Track the speaker).

While a strong, productive culture will be the foundation of student discipline, we will use several different approaches to managing inappropriate behaviors. AF Hartford teachers will be trained in an array of student discipline techniques. They will identify and address the antecedent causes of behavior. Teachers will manage minor disruptions in their classrooms and teach the common routines and behaviors necessary for our students to be successful. The AF Hartford advisory system will enable teachers to build strong, supportive and respectful relationships with students. Teachers will use the AF Hartford values (Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, Hard Work) as opportunities for teachable moments and positive reinforcement. Frequent parent contacts will provide opportunities for teachers and parents to work together to problem-solve when behavior problems occur. However, when problems persist or escalate, the Dean of Students will intervene and counsel students.

AF Hartford will have a strict disciplinary policy. At AF Hartford, we believe that children do what you let them. We will raise the bar of behavior by setting high expectations and enforcing them with PIC (Persistence, Insistence, Consistence). Our high expectations will be crystal-clear to our students, and poor behavior choices will be addressed quickly and effectively. We will establish a positive, caring, tough love atmosphere where students feel safe and successful.

**R.E.A.C.H. Values**

AF Hartford will share the positive, structured, no excuses school culture that is integral to the success of Amistad and other Achievement First schools as high-performing academic institutions. In addition to academics, the school's mission calls for teachers to help develop the character and leadership skills of students. Following the Amistad Academy's successful character education program, AF Hartford will have clear, school-wide expectations for student behavior that are defined by five REACH values: 1. Respect, 2. Enthusiasm, 3. Achievement, 4. Citizenship, and 5. Hard Work. The simple acronym, which students will hear and see everywhere and all the time at AF Hartford, will make it easy for teachers, students, and parents to remember and communicate what is expected of AF Hartford students from participating actively in class, wearing their uniform with pride, and helping classmates who are having trouble. The REACH rubric will also be designed to be grade-specific, and older students will be expected to behave even better than younger students; our belief is that just as children should progress in reading, writing, and math, they should progress in their behavioral/REACH skills.

Good behavior will be thought of in the same way as academics – it must be taught. Effective behavior instruction, like effective academic instruction, will be modeled, practiced, and reinforced. Teachers will work with students to visualize how an activity should look and model the desired behavior. Students will then practice the model, and they should be provided with meaningful, positive, corrective feedback. Among other skills, we will explicitly teach our students how to shake hands, sit properly, walk in lines, clean up after themselves, make eye contact, and say “please” and “thank you”.

The AF Hartford approach to student behavior will be overwhelmingly positive. While there will be clear, strict consequences for poor behavior at AF Hartford, research finds that positive recognition of good behavior is more likely to fundamentally improve student behavior. AF Hartford teachers will work to recognize all students for their accomplishments, even if they are small. Achievement of high standards and improvement will be celebrated with both students and parents. Students will regularly receive “posi-notes” congratulating them on a particular area of success. Parents will regularly receive positive phone calls from teachers.

**Advisors**

In order to develop the positive teacher-student relationships necessary for student success, each student at AF Hartford will have two advisors. Students will meet with their advisory groups daily to explore stories, poetry, and events that reinforce the REACH values. Moreover, the advisors will be the contact point for information about the student. Other teachers who have questions or concerns about the student will come to the advisor, and the advisors will meet with parents about progress report, report card, and disciplinary issues. Importantly, the advisors will also be the chief cheerleader for their students, designing incentive systems and frequently celebrating the achievements of their advisees in large and small ways.

**Parents as Partners**

We also recognize the importance of parental involvement, and have built a strong culture around parents as partners. Parents, students and school staff all sign a compact of mutual responsibilities, which outlines shared commitment to hard work and consistent support of one another. School staff will pledge to offer a high-quality education, to demonstrate the highest standards of professionalism, and to appreciate, support and respect every student and parent. The requirements of AF Hartford parents are also significant, including nightly reading logs, and support for homework, in addition to an understanding of the more demanding school environment, which include a longer school day, near-perfect attendance, and a high-expectations discipline policy. We need and expect parental support in promoting academic success and positive behavior.

### School Schedule

- Length of day, co-curriculum, Saturday academies, optional programming, Summer School

The AF Hartford school day will run from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 7:30 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. on Fridays. Including our three-week mandatory summer academy, which will run from late June through early July, our school year will run 197 days for students and 213 days for teachers. This school day and year will allow us to give almost 200 hours of instruction each year over that which traditional public districts across the state provide; while also dramatically increasing the amount of professional development and planning time available to teachers and other academic staff. Moreover, the intensive focus around literacy and mathematics will ensure that students are very strong in the fundamental skills they will need to tackle challenging, higher level material.

### AF Hartford Elementary Academy Schedule

|             | Monday through Thursday   | Friday  |
|-------------|---|---|
| 7:30-7:50   | Breakfast, Morning Work and Intensive Tutoring  | Breakfast, Morning Work and Intensive Tutoring  |
| 7:50-7:55   | Check-in  | Check-in  |
| 8:00-9:30   | Core Language Arts, Part I (Reading Mastery, Guided Reading)  | Core Language Arts, Part I (Reading Mastery, Guided Reading)  |
| 9:30-11:00  | Core Language Arts, Part II (Reading Mastery, Guided Reading, Waterford Early Reading)<br><br>** key time for instruction and curricular integration of technology standards, art standards | Core Language Arts, Part II (Reading Mastery, Guided Reading, Waterford Early Reading)<br><br>** key time for instruction and curricular integration of technology standards, art standards |
| 11:00-11:10 | Snack   | Snack   |
| 11:10-11:30 |   |   |
| 11:30-11:50 | REACH Time (advisors and students)<br>** key time for languages other than English  | Math (Saxon Math, Problem-Solving)  |
| 11:50-12:15 |   |   |
| 12:15-12:45 | Math (Saxon Math, Problem-Solving)  | Writing   |
| 12:45-1:10  | Lunch   |   |
| 1:20-1:50   | Music / P.E.<br>** key time for instruction and integration of health and family consumer sciences standards (PE) and arts/dance standards (Music)  | Lunch to 1:40 / Dismissal at 1:50   |
| 1:50 – 2:30 | Writing   |   |
| 2:35-3:40   | Science / Social Studies<br>** key time for instruction and integration of career development and occupational studies (social studies)   |   |
| 3:40-4:00   | Dismissal   |   |
| 3:45-4:00   | Intensive Tutoring  |   |
| 4:00-4:50   |   |   |
| 4:50-5:00   | Cleaning / Dismissal  |   |
| 5:00-6:00   | Homework Club   |   |

## AF Hartford Middle School Academy Schedule

|               | Monday through Thursday  | Friday                                |
|---------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 7:15          | Doors Open!  |                                       |
| 7:30-7:50     | Breakfast, Morning Work and Intensive Tutoring   |                                       |
| 7:50-8:00     | Morning Circle   |                                       |
| 8:00 – 8:05   | Transition to Class  |                                       |
| 8:10 – 9:10   | Block I – Literature   |                                       |
| 9:15 – 10:20  | Block II – Mathematics   |                                       |
| 10:20 – 10:30 | Snack/Break  |                                       |
| 11:30 – 11:45 | Block III – Writing (Technology 2 x's per week)<br>* Key time for instruction and integration of technology standards                                      |                                       |
| 11:40 – 12:05 | Morning Work Review/Advisory/REACH   |                                       |
| 12:10 – 1:00  | Block IV – Science/Social Studies<br>*Key time for instruction and integration of career and occupational studies  |                                       |
| 1:05 – 1:25   | Lunch  |                                       |
| 1:30 – 1:50   | Independent Reading  | Independent Reading/Dismissal at 1:50 |
| 1:50 – 2:55   | Block V – Reading Skills<br>**Starting in 7 <sup>th</sup> grade, Reading Skills class will be replaced w/Spanish, fulfilling languages other than English  |                                       |
| 3:00 – 3:45   | Block 6 - P.E./Music<br>** key time for instruction and integration of health and family consumer sciences standards (PE) and arts/dance standards (Music) |                                       |
| 4:00          | Dismissal  |                                       |
| 4:05          | Buses Depart   |                                       |
| 4:05 – 5:00   | Intensive Tutoring/Homework Club/Enrichment Activities   |                                       |
| 5:00          | Cleaning / Dismissal   |                                       |

**Support Services**

- Tutoring, special education, community services, parent support programs

All students with disabilities attending AF Hartford will be accorded a free, appropriate and public education (FAPE). Disability will not be used as a criterion for non-eligibility for admissions or enrollment; rather, AF Hartford welcomes the chance to educate every child, regardless of ability level. AF Hartford will comply with all regulatory special education requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and any other civil rights enforced by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR). Likewise, AF Hartford will fully comply with additional regulations and policies of the State of Connecticut.

**Special Education**

AF Hartford will meet all the requirements mandated within a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Experienced and certified Special Education teachers and related services staff members will be employed to ensure that the unique needs and learning styles of all students are being met. These teachers and related services staff members will coordinate the direct instruction and inclusion of Special Education students. To the extent possible, Special Education students and students with disabilities will be included in regular education programming. Physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language services will be provided to students in classroom to the extent possible. Other supports, including tutoring and counseling will be provided in the environment most conducive to the student's growth and development.

**English Language Learners**

AF Hartford shall serve any and all students with limited English proficiency (English Language Learners or "ELL") using structured English language immersion so they achieve proficiency in the English language as quickly as possible. AF Hartford shall comply with all applicable laws including Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended) and the federal Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974. Students at AF Hartford with limited proficiency in English will achieve proficiency in the English language as quickly as possible through the use of AF Hartford's services and teaching methods. AF Hartford ensures that ELL students will not be excluded from curricular and extracurricular activities based on an inability to speak and understand the language of instruction, and also that ELL students will not be assigned to special education because of their lack of English proficiency. To the extent possible, parents whose English proficiency is limited will receive notices and information from AF Hartford in their native language to encourage participation in AF Hartford by all members of the AF Hartford community. Parental outreach may also be conducted through home visit by an AF Hartford official and an interpreter.

If a student is identified as having behavioral or academic challenges that cannot be successfully remediated through normal education intervention, said student will be referred for early intervention programming. This Program of Alternative Strategies (PAS) will ensure that a team of professionals familiar with the student meets on a regular basis to implement strategies of remediation, document progress related to individual strategies, amend strategies as necessary, and ensure that the student make adequate progress and growth. If strategies identified fail to remediate all behavioral or academic challenges, the student may be referred for special education. During this meeting, parents and regular academic teachers will discuss adjustments that have been made thus far in the classroom. If the alternative strategies have not worked sufficiently, a PPT referral will be made for assessment by HPS. HPS will then proceed with assessments to determine whether special education services will be appropriate. Once these assessments have been conducted, HPS will convene a PPT meeting to review them. However, AF Hartford will keep children at the school, except in extreme circumstances where a specialized school is required through the PPT/IEP process.

**Application Process**

- Process, timeline, and requirements

- AF Hartford will assign seats to Hartford students through the all-choice system of schools process.

**Design Team**

Dacia Toll, Chair  
Steve Harris, Parent  
Josephine Smith, Principal of Betances Elementary  
Colleen Palmer, CREC  
Jeff House, Teacher, Amistad Academy  
Andrea Comer, HPS Board Member

*\*Additional community leaders were involved at various stages of the design process, particularly in the development of the Charter application to the CT State Department of Education.*