

# ANNUAL REPORT



achievementfirst.org

## OFFICES

### Connecticut

495 Blake Street  
New Haven, CT 06515

### New York

335 Adams Street, Suite 700  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

### Rhode Island

370 Hartford Avenue  
Providence, RI 02909





# Dear Friends,

As leaders of Achievement First, we are part of a powerful and resourceful team—a team of indomitable educators, families and students—who all work hard every day to improve ourselves and our world. This report is the story of all of us.

It's the story of 11,600 scholars, proving that our country's vexing achievement gap can be closed—not just at one school, but in five cities across three states. It's about low-income students in New York who, by eighth grade, top the state non-poor average in English and Language Arts (ELA) and outperform affluent districts like Rye and Scarsdale in math. It's about our Bridgeport elementary students, who posted math achievement scores that were higher than those in Fairfield and Greenwich. It's also about our first class of Providence students, who outperformed the Rhode Island average in ELA and even the wealthiest communities in the state, like Jamestown and East Greenwich, in math.

It is because of them—and all of the students we don't serve—that we will never stop innovating, questioning, challenging and getting better. Our story is driven by our tremendous teachers and leaders, who bring dedication, passion, high expectations, affirmation and caring to school every day as our kids grow from kindergarten through high school graduation.

Our alumni—young leaders on college campuses throughout the country, where they are studying business, biology, the arts and much more—are earning college diplomas and taking the next step toward achieving their dreams. You can even find some of them returning to our classrooms, this time as teachers. This is their story, too.

It is also about our Network Support teams providing the exemplary services our schools need and deserve, developing our game-changing AF Greenfield program and ensuring a fully “open source” culture where we share what we know and actively learn from others.

Most of all, ours is a story of love—the kind of simultaneously warm and demanding love that can be transformative for our scholars, each other and our communities.

And without you—our partners, friends, board members, donors, community leaders and neighbors—this story would not be possible. We are proud to stand alongside all of you as we reflect back on last year and look toward another year in which we move even closer to achieving our audacious goals.

Many Minds, One Mission!

  
Dacia M. Toll  
Co-CEO

  
Doug McCurry  
Co-CEO

  
Andrew Boas  
Board Chair







## Our Story

They told us it couldn't be done—the system was broken, the challenges too great. We didn't listen, and so our students didn't, either.

In 1999 we opened one great school in Amistad Academy. We know every child deserves a great school, so we built on what we learned and we added another, and another. Soon, a network was born. Now we are 32 schools, three states, and more than 11,600 scholars strong. In our schools, you'll find some of the best teaching and learning in the country.

Every day, our scholars are solving for x and shattering stereotypes, winning debate tournaments and football games and shining as first-generation college students. They are constantly learning and improving and so are we.

We are strong but not satisfied, and we won't stop until all children have access to the high-quality education they need and deserve. Ours is a story of hard work and endless love.



## Who We Are

We believe that what we do and how we do it both matter.

Our Core Values don't just hang on a wall or sit on a web page. They drive all that we do.

You can feel Team & Family when you enter our schools and our Network Support offices. Everything With Integrity is the fabric of who we are.

Above all, we're a community that does Whatever It Takes for kids and for each other.

## Our Core Values

### RESULTS WITHOUT EXCUSES

We take responsibility for making sure that our students succeed, and if we fall short, we do not make excuses or blame others.



### EXCELLENCE IS A HABIT

Achievement First expects excellence from our students and therefore from all the adults who work with them.



### TEAM & FAMILY

Achievement First is a community where everyone cares about, values, supports and invests in each other.



### WHATEVER IT TAKES

With a social justice mission at our core, we feel tremendous urgency to go the extra mile to make a life-changing difference for our students.



### MANY MINDS, ONE MISSION

We believe that we can go further faster when we work together—actively supporting and challenging one another to pursue real excellence.



### EVERYTHING WITH INTEGRITY

We say what we mean and do what we say.







### JEANINE MASON, TEACHER

Hails from North Carolina. Graduated from Brown University. Stayed right in "Little Rhody" to make big changes. First-class, first-grade teacher helping her Achievement First Illuminar Mayoral Academy Fireflies shine as readers.

At home at AF, and making sure AF feels like home for kids.



## Our Approach

Achievement First is a community of doers. We dive into challenges because that's who we are.

We set high expectations so that our students can exceed them. We are preparing our scholars by committing to:

### 🌀 An Unwavering Focus on Student Achievement

We are committed to our audacious mission: that our students can achieve at the same high levels as their affluent peers.

### 🌀 Teacher & Leader Talent Development

Our principals participate in a two-year, in-school residency training program before leading a school. Our new teachers participate in nearly four weeks of professional development before the school year begins, and every teacher has a coach who provides individual support.

### 🌀 More Time Spent Learning

Our longer school days and school year mean our students receive the equivalent of one additional year of instruction over a K-12 education.

### 🌀 A Rigorous, Common-Core Aligned Curriculum

Each grade at Achievement First builds on the foundation laid in the last. Our curriculum is aligned to the internationally benchmarked Common Core standards and to true college readiness.

### 🌀 Strong School Cultures Built on Engagement, Structure & Joy

Our schools thrive based on high expectations and warm, loving environments with a deep commitment to learning, rigor, joy, character development, structure and strong relationships with teachers, leaders and families.

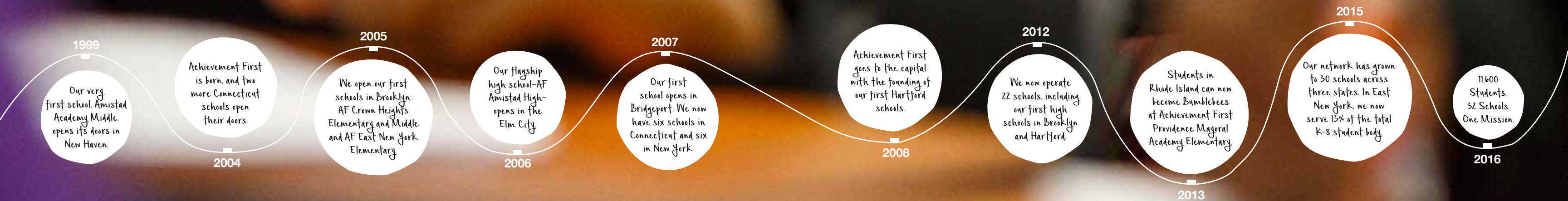




## Our Theory of Change

We have 32 excellent schools, but that is only part of our impact. We want to inspire large-scale change by:

- ☉ **Serving as an Excellence with Equity Exemplar**
- ☉ **Opening More Gap-Closing Schools**
- ☉ **Sharing with & Learning from Others**







## Serving as an Excellence with Equity Exemplar

Our excellence is apparent: you can see it in our brilliant, resilient, socially conscious, joyous students and our game-changing alumni.

But excellence alone is not enough. We also relentlessly pursue equity. We're dedicated to serving students in our communities—all students—regardless of abilities, needs and challenges.

We're committed to their success and to proving what's possible when students have a great education.

### EXCELLENCE



91%

91% of first graders across our schools scored proficient in reading.\*



100%

100% of high school students take at least one AP class before they graduate.\*\*



Top 10%

Amistad Academy and Elm City College Prep were named among the top 10% of schools in CT.\*\*\*

### EQUITY



80%

80% of our high school graduates will be first in their families to graduate college.

ABC

3.5X

In NY, our English Language Learners achieved proficiency at 3.5 times the rate of their state peers.\*\*\*\*



EXCEL

Students with special needs outperformed their peers in affluent districts including Rye and Scarsdale.\*\*\*\*

\*Foundas & Pinnell and STEP Assessment results  
 \*\*10th Annual AP Report to the Nation  
 \*\*\*Connecticut State Department of Education  
 \*\*\*\*New York State Test



## Opening More Gap-Closing Schools

We aren't just building and running schools. We are instigating long-lasting change. By growing within the communities we already serve—and working closely with students, families and local leaders—we are helping to further enrich the cities we call home, and we're proving that gap-closing excellence is possible at scale.



### 11,600 STUDENTS

11,600 students in 52 schools  
(Connecticut, New York  
and Rhode Island)



### 2 NEW SCHOOLS

Two new schools: AF East Brooklyn  
High and AF Voyager Middle.



### 10 APPLICATIONS

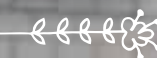
AF receives an average of 10 lottery  
applications for every open seat.



### KATISMA, PARENT

Raising her family in Brooklyn. Raising her expectations for herself and finishing her degree in psychology. Proud AF Linden Elementary parent leader who advocates for more strong schools in her community.

Will never stop inspiring her daughter Kiyra all the way to college and beyond.





## Sharing with & Learning from Others

It's not just about our kids. It's about all kids. That's what public education is for: not just achieving great results, but also serving the public good.

We are a fully "open source" organization. We want to help all of us go further, faster toward the goal of providing an excellent education for every child, everywhere.

We're sharing lesson plans, assessments, systems and trainings. We're partnering with traditional districts through the Residency Program for School Leadership because we are invested in creating future leaders for all schools.

We are approaching our third year working collaboratively on the Charter Network Accelerator because we are committed to helping other CMOs, particularly those led by people of color, grow and scale. We want to share what we know, and learn what we don't, because that is what is best for all kids.







# Our Results

Across our network of thriving schools, we are proud of all that are our students have accomplished and energized by all they have yet to do.

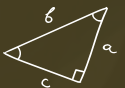
## CONNECTICUT

We began with a single flagship school: Amistad Academy Middle. Today, we have 11 schools in Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven.



### CLOSING THE GAP

By eighth grade, our students are topping the state average in both ELA and math\*



### EXCELLENCE

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy Elementary third graders not only outperformed the state average, they topped their affluent peers in Fairfield and Greenwich in math\*



### #1

Achievement First Hartford High students outperformed their state and district peers on the SAT, and are the highest-performing low-income students in Connecticut.



### TOP 5

All AF Connecticut schools rank among the top 5 in the state for high-need students\*\*

\*Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium  
\*\*For English Language Learners, low-income students and students of color, according to ConnCAN 2015.





## NEW YORK

Our 19 Brooklyn schools are achieving outstanding results.



### OUTPERFORMED!

Every AF school, grade and subject combination outperformed the host district, and 54% of AF schools did so by more than 30 percentage points.\*



### 100%

For the fourth consecutive year, 100% of AF Brooklyn High graduating seniors earned college acceptance.



### TOP

By eighth grade, our students are topping the state non-poor average and outperforming affluent districts like Rye and Scarsdale in math.\*



### OVERALL

As a network, AF improved by 18 percentage points in ELA and 14 percentage points in math, growing more year-over-year than any of our comparison networks or districts.\*

\*New York State Test

## RHODE ISLAND

Our two Rhode Island schools are proving what's possible in the Ocean State.



### 96%

96% of K-2 students across our Rhode Island schools scored proficient in reading.\*

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

### MATH

In math, Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy third graders outperformed affluent districts including Jamestown and East Greenwich.\*\*



### ELA

Our students achieve proficiency in ELA at more than double the rate of their host district peers.\*\*

\*Foundas & Pinnell and STEP Assessment results  
\*\*Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)



## JAHKAI, STUDENT

Proud of his math skills. Prouder of his consistent triumphs over adversity. Born and raised in Hartford. National Latin Exam Honoree, state champion football player and future first-generation college graduate.

Bound to be a leader, to earn his diploma at University of Tennessee-Martin, and to one day become a sports agent.

Bound to be a leader, to earn his diploma at University of Tennessee-Martin, and to one day become a sports agent.





## A Focus on College...

We deeply believe in the power of higher education and know that it's never too early to plan for what's next. Our students and alumni, these are our doctors, our lawyers. They're architects, scientists, actors, artists, philosophers. They are community organizers and dancers, engineers and poets. These are our CEOs, our teachers, our presidents.



### T'CHAD, STUDENT

Cornell University summer design program alumna.  
McKinsey & Company summer intern. Still has one year to go  
at AF University Prep High.

Daughter, scholar, friend, fashion designer and feminist, just  
back from exploring what that means at Hampshire College's  
summer program. Hopes to major in women and gender  
studies. For her, there is no ceiling-glass or otherwise.



92%

AF high school students  
who take part in an  
internship, pre-college  
program or enrichment  
program before graduation.



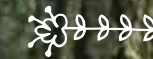




### ALEXANDRIA BLACKWOOD, ALUMNA

Amistad Academy Middle Class of 2005. University of Tampa Class of 2013. Teaching the next generation of leaders. Class of Right Now.

Knows it isn't easy, but won't stop until she sees all of the students she teaches at Achievement First Hartford Academy Elementary go on to achieve their own dreams. Like she's doing right now.



## ...and College Graduation

It's not enough for our students to get to college. We want them not just to attend and graduate, but also to thrive and lead. That's why we continue to work closely with our alumni from SUNY to Stanford. It's why our kindergarten students can tell you what year they are supposed to graduate from college and why our juniors study colleges' 5-year graduation rates when they're making their college lists. It's why our classrooms are named after our teachers' alma maters, and why our high school students do internships and pre-college programs. Ensuring our students are successful in college and career is at the center of everything we do.



## A Commitment to Innovation

We are strong but not satisfied, and the drive to innovate, challenge and improve has long been a part of our DNA. So we asked ourselves: If we could start with a green field—with nothing built on it yet—and we could design any kind of school program, what would it look like?

In seeking to answer this question and help develop the best prepared students in the world, the AF Greenfield model was born.

## ANCHORING OUR VISION

Every decision we make for the Greenfield model is anchored in our pursuit of achieving accelerated academics, student investment and life habits, excellence in enrichment and awesomely powerful community. At their intersection lies a culture where everyone feels driven, motivated and engaged.

### SIX LIFE HABITS OF GREENFIELD:

#### DRIVE



#### GRATITUDE



#### PERSONAL GROWTH



#### TEAMWORK



#### EMPATHY



#### CURIOSITY





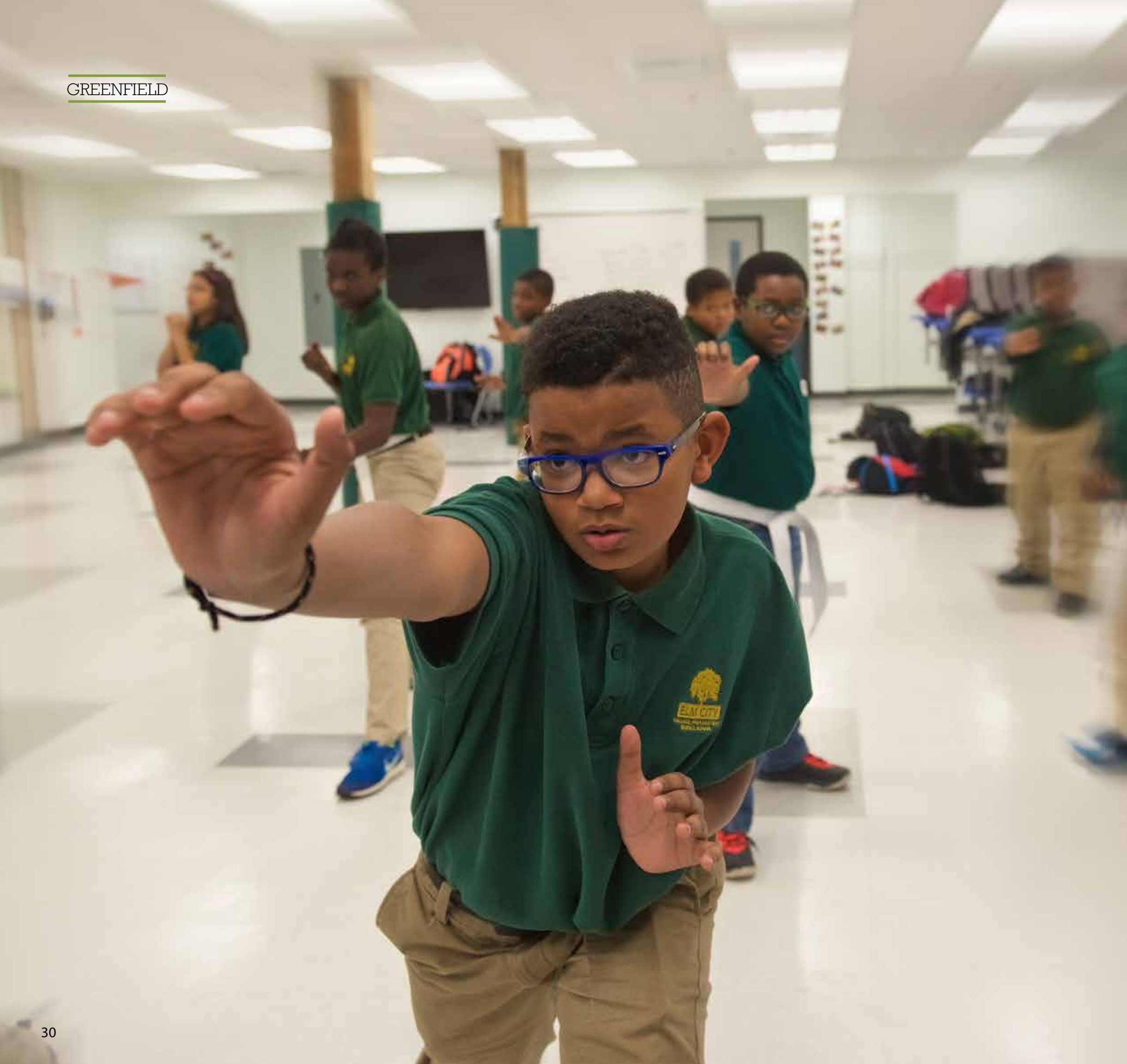
## DREAMING AUDACIOUSLY

We're helping our students to dream audaciously and stretch to the edge of what's possible. We're equipping them with the motivation and the skills to take charge of chasing down those dreams.

Our commitment to their dreams is apparent at the start of every year, when students write their personal narratives about who they are, what's important to them and where they're going. Throughout the school year, these goals are at the forefront of the journeys they travel alongside their dream teams: personalized groups made up of a classmate "running partner," goal coach, family and other important mentors. These big goals are then turned into weekly and even daily goals, and our students engage regularly in the critical process of setting goals, developing their plans, trying, tracking progress, reflecting and adjusting—and starting the process all over again with new goals and the knowledge that their goals are achievable if they have drive and growth mindset.







## NOT A TYPICAL CLASSROOM

Step inside our classrooms, dance studios, taekwondo dojangs and band rooms, and you'll see so many different types of learning happening simultaneously. You'll see students working independently, learning in small groups and working closely with teachers. You'll see large groups of students deep in discussion and debate with their classmates as they delve into humanities, science and enrichment.

And every eight weeks, you'll see students going beyond the school walls. They're in a theater, staging a production of *Macbeth*. They're working with leading engineers at a national robotics competition. They're on farms studying the environment and issues of hunger and nutrition. And when they come back, they've honed their skills and deepened their learning in these real-world settings.

What does this all look like in action? What happens when the Greenfield model expands from a kindergarten, fifth and sixth-grade pilot to a fully immersive K-6 experience at Elm City College Prep this year? Keep watching. The game's about to change.



# Our Spaces

We are committed to opening more schools and serving more students. That doesn't just mean making sure we create spaces for safe learning environments in a cost effective matter. It means we're also creating facilities infused with a bright and inviting educational atmosphere. We're developing schools that communicate excellence and professionalism and that inspire achievement for the hundreds of future leaders inside.



## AN EXCITING ADDITION

At Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy, we are capping off a \$10 million renovation with an outdoor playscape, which will be shared with the neighborhood.

## AN INNOVATIVE RENOVATION

Thanks to the generosity of Joel E. Smilow, we have created seven new classrooms, a renovated outdoor play area and a new playscape at Elm City College Prep Elementary for the growing K-6 Greenfield program. We have also purchased two properties adjacent to Elm City College Preparatory Middle for future expansion of the middle school campus.

## GRAND OPENING & NEW HOME

AF East Brooklyn High and AF Voyager Middle opened their doors for the first time. Also, AF Apollo Middle moved into a more spacious home in the same building as AF East Brooklyn High. Aesthetic improvements were made for all three schools to create a joyful space for teaching and learning.







DONATE.  
BE AN ADVOCATE.  
JOIN OUR TEAM & FAMILY.  
[achievementfirst.org](https://achievementfirst.org)



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Achievement First



# Finances

AF is committed to running a K-12 public school network at scale with the same resources that are currently available to our host districts. AF schools pay a 10% management fee to cover the expenses of the Network Support team, which is significantly less than the percent of total expenses that most districts allocate to their central offices.

## CORE OPERATIONS\*

Revenues	
Management fees	\$18,006,055
Public grants	\$235,000
Philanthropy	\$2,000,000
Other	\$59,529
<b>Total revenues</b>	<b>\$20,300,584</b>

## CORE EXPENSES

Personnel expenses	\$15,696,350
Non-personnel expenses	\$4,597,806
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$20,294,156</b>
<b>Surplus/(deficit)</b>	<b>\$6,428</b>

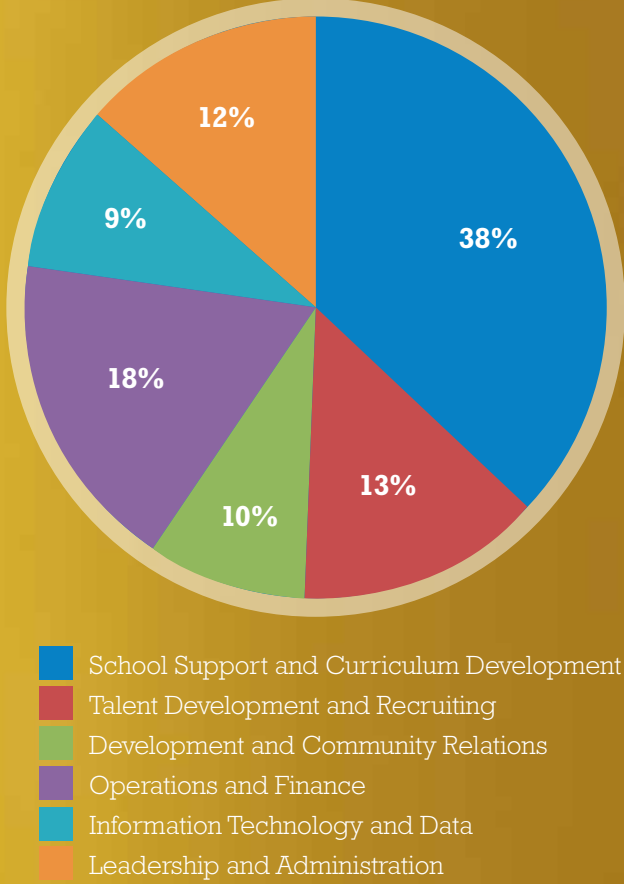
## ACCELERATE INITIATIVES\*\*

Accelerate Revenues	\$9,750,000
Accelerate Expenses:	
Personnel expenses	\$4,421,987
Non-personnel expenses	\$4,947,756
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$9,369,743</b>
<b>Accelerate net surplus/(deficit)</b>	<b>\$380,257</b>

\*Core operations include the revenue and services provided for in the management agreement between AF and its schools and include the key activities that AF does to support our K-12 program.

\*\*Accelerate initiatives include programs which either lie outside our core K-12 program, such as our AF Through College initiative, or are "R&D" work with independent sources of funding, such as our Greenfield program.

## NETWORK SUPPORT EXPENSES



## OUR SCHOOL FINANCES

	NY	CT
District spending per pupil*	\$16,456	\$16,339
Revenues per pupil**		
Philanthropy	\$398	\$2,675
Federal	\$581	\$474
State/district	\$15,872	\$11,740
<b>Total per pupil revenues</b>	<b>\$16,851</b>	<b>\$14,889</b>
Expenses per pupil**		
Personnel	\$11,986	\$10,318
Non-personnel	\$4,811	\$4,177
<b>Total per pupil expenses</b>	<b>\$16,797</b>	<b>\$14,495</b>

\*District spending data is the most recent available (from the 2014-15 school year) and is controlled for services provided in kind (facilities, food services, debt and pension costs).

\*\*Achievement First data encompasses the 2015-2016 fiscal year and includes AF's fully grown schools only (Amistad Academy Elementary, Amistad Academy Middle, AF Amistad High, Elm City College Prep Elementary, Elm City College Prep Middle, AF Bridgeport Academy Elementary, AF Bridgeport Academy Middle, AF Hartford Academy Elementary, AF Hartford Academy Middle, AF Hartford High, AF Apollo Elementary, AF Brownsville Elementary, AF Brownsville Middle, AF Bushwick Elementary, AF Bushwick Middle, AF Crown Heights Elementary, AF Crown Heights Middle, AF Brooklyn High, AF Endeavor Elementary, AF Endeavor Middle, AF East New York Elementary, AF East New York Middle). AF Rhode Island schools are not yet fully grown, thus Rhode Island comparison data is excluded.





Achievements First is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. We are grateful that so many like-minded individuals and organizations believe in our mission and donate their time, energy and resources to our schools and network. Given the disparity in how district public schools and charter public schools are funded, we could not operate our schools without the generosity of the following individuals, foundations and organizations.

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