



Achievement First Amistad High School Is The Number Two High School for

Writing Scores on the CAPT in Connecticut

**Its Comprehensive Writing Program Drives Student Performance on Par With Affluent Cities Such as
Simsbury, Conn.**

NEW HAVEN- Achievement First Amistad High School, an urban high school dedicated to educating historically underserved students, is ranked second in the state for writing, behind only Simsbury. More than 92 percent of our 10th graders scored at/above goal on the CAPT's Writing section, and 100 percent of our students' reached proficiency. In the city of New Haven, the host district in which AF Amistad High School operates, 33.5 percent of traditional public school students reached goal, and 74.5 percent achieved proficiency.

AF Amistad High School produces such drastically different outcomes from its host district, attaining outstanding results with low-income, African-American and Latino students, through its comprehensive writing program that emphasizes writing across several core subjects.

The school fosters an abundance of cross-content collaboration: students write essays every three weeks, with the content shifting between literature and history. The process includes opportunities for writing persuasively, annotating and discussing in seminar. It is a thorough, school-wide, developed focus on writing that is unprecedented in urban public schools.

- The school stresses curriculum alignment. AF Amistad High School is a collaborative environment in which teachers coordinate instruction across disciplines. For example, a student taking AP U.S. History learns about the Spanish American war. That student also reads and annotates Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden" in literature class, discusses in seminar whether American policy in the Philippines was proper and legitimate, and responds to the seminar question with an essay in composition class. Students are held to high-level expectations.
- Those expectations are outlined in a first-of-its-kind online writing rubric. The rubric will be part of a new high school website we're developing; that site will launch in the coming weeks. In order to develop the rubric, we gathered essays from the most prestigious and rigorous private schools in the country, using them to create for students a detailed roadmap for success in writing across all humanities subjects and grade levels. The comprehensive approach enhances college readiness.
- An emphasis on writing is enforced every day at AF Amistad High School since effective writing greatly influences future success. A 2010 College Board study proved that considering all

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sections of the SAT, scores on the Writing section were most predictive of future college. The level of critical thinking needed to develop comprehensive essays prepares students for the rigor of a college curriculum.

- Achievement First's approach to high school excellence is rooted in education policy expert David Conley's college readiness framework. With an intentional focus on those skills most predictive of college success, AF high school students are educated and assessed along the following four dimensions of readiness: **key cognitive strategies**, which includes the ability to conduct research and interpret evidence, **key content knowledge**, which addresses mastery of academic skills, **self-management**, which measures study skills and goal setting, and **college knowledge**, which provides students with coaching and counseling to emotionally and financially prepare for college.

ABOUT ACHIEVEMENT FIRST

The mission of Achievement First is to close the achievement gap and deliver on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all children, regardless of race, economic status or zip code. With its college-preparatory focus, the Achievement First approach is attaining breakthrough academic gains throughout its network of 20 public charter schools. In the 2011-12 academic year, Achievement First is educating nearly 6,200 children in historically low-performing and underserved neighborhoods in Connecticut and New York (with Rhode Island opening in fall 2013).

Achievement First's approach to teaching and learning enables every student to succeed at the highest levels. This involves:

- Providing students with more time on task and intense intervention when they are struggling so that no child falls through the cracks.
- Recruiting and developing successful teachers and school leaders and empowering them to use student data to strategically drive instruction.
- Creating a joyful school culture where it is "cool to be smart" that emphasizes character education and focuses students on college.