

ACHIEVEMENT FIRST
Annual Report
2014-15



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Dear Friends,

Seventeen years ago, our first school—Amistad Academy—opened its doors in New Haven to 84 students. In the years since, that one middle school has become a thriving network of 30 schools serving more than 10,600 students in grades K-12 across Connecticut, New York and Rhode Island.

Every day we're inspired by all that our students and educators have accomplished. Our students continue to excel—100% of our graduating seniors were accepted to colleges and universities for the sixth consecutive year. Our schools continue to shine—most recently, AF Amistad High was ranked the #2 high school in Connecticut by *U.S. News & World Report*. Our network continues to thrive—the Broad Foundation recognized AF as one of the country's top three charter networks based on student achievement.

We are equally compelled by what remains to be done. Since 2013, we have been responding to an achievement wake-up call. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards made it clear that the old state tests had set too low of a bar for our students and ourselves. We have always been committed to aggressive, continuous improvement at Achievement First, but these higher, internationally competitive standards required us to magnify our efforts. We upgraded our curriculum in every grade and subject. We adjusted our summer and school year schedules to allow leaders and teachers to spend several weeks digging into rigorous content and preparing instruction that would cultivate much higher levels of student thinking and engagement.

In addition, we partnered with IDEO, one of the top design firms in the world, to develop a new school design that better leverages technology and all that we have learned from cognitive science and our colleagues across the country. The result is our AF Greenfield project, which we are piloting at two of our New Haven schools this school year. This model is built on the three pillars of accelerated expectations, student ownership and personalization, and an awesomely powerful community.

Our “Team & Family” has also joined together to rally with thousands of other supporters of high-quality charter and district public schools in rallies in Connecticut, New York and Rhode Island to stand up and help ensure every child has access to a great school. We know that all parents want their children to have a great education, and we're committed to doing everything we can—on a school-level, as a network and as part of a larger movement—to make sure every child has the opportunities in life that flow from a great education.

We remain ever committed to growing, improving and innovating. We are also ever grateful for your support and partnership on this climb. It takes all of us working together to ensure our students—and our great country—achieve our full potential.

Many Minds, One Mission,

Dacia M. Toll
Co-CEO

Doug McCurry
Co-CEO

William R. Berkley
Board Chair

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Achievement First At A Glance



30 SCHOOLS



10,600 STUDENTS



3 STATES

**EDUCATION
=
FREEDOM**

ONE MISSION

A BRIEF HISTORY

Achievement First (AF) is a growing network of non-profit, high-performing, college-preparatory, K to 12 public charter schools in Connecticut, New York and Rhode Island.

Our first school, Amistad Academy, was founded in New Haven in 1999 and the larger network, Achievement First, was established in 2003. We set out to create great schools that serve and support students from low-income, high-needs communities in achieving academic success at the same high levels as their more affluent peers. We continue to be inspired by this same mission today with the opening of our 30th school in the 2015-16 school year.

“I am so passionate about Achievement First because it is not only changing my son’s life, it is changing the lives of everyone in my family.”
– YANELI, PARENT, ACHIEVEMENT FIRST PROVIDENCE MAYORAL ACADEMY ELEMENTARY



A Mission-Driven Organization

The mission of Achievement First is to deliver on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all of America’s children. We believe that all children, regardless of race or economic status, can succeed if they have access to a great education. Achievement First schools provide all of our students with the academic and character skills they need to graduate from top colleges, to succeed in a competitive world and to serve as the next generation of leaders in our communities.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE



Serve as an Excellence & Equity Exemplar



Open More Gap-Closing Schools



Concentrate our Impact



Share with and Learn from Others

“My favorite core value is ‘Whatever it Takes.’ In our school community, this means we never give up.”

— CARL GERVAIS, FITNESS TEACHER,
AF LINDEN ELEMENTARY

Our Core Values

We believe in living by our core values. At Achievement First, these values inform and guide us in all aspects of what we do—from the classroom to the Network Support office—and help our mission-driven organization thrive with a positive, achievement-oriented culture.



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



We expect excellence from our students and therefore from all the adults who work with them.



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.



We are a community where everyone cares about, values, supports and invests in each other. We are a talent-focused organization that recruits passionate and thoughtful staff and then invests significantly in developing them.



We believe that we can go further faster when we work together—actively supporting and challenging one another to achieve collective success.



We say what we mean and do what we say. We believe what you achieve and how you do it both matter, and we work hard to make sure our actions speak as powerfully as our words.

Serving as an Excellence & Equity Exemplar

Excellence: We are dedicated to helping students develop the academic and character skills they need to succeed in college, career and life.

Equity: We are equally dedicated to serving *all* students—student populations similar to our local communities and school districts—so that we can serve as authentic “proof points” of what is possible when students have access to a great education.

EXCELLENCE

We were named one of three finalists for the Broad Prize, the top national award for CMOs, based on rigorous analysis of student achievement, college persistence and other outcome data.

2015 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools, Finalist



92% of FIRST graders across our schools scored proficient in READING*



100% of our HIGH SCHOOL graduates gained acceptance to COLLEGE

AMISTAD RANKED #2 in Connecticut on U.S. News & World Report's list of BEST HIGH SCHOOLS

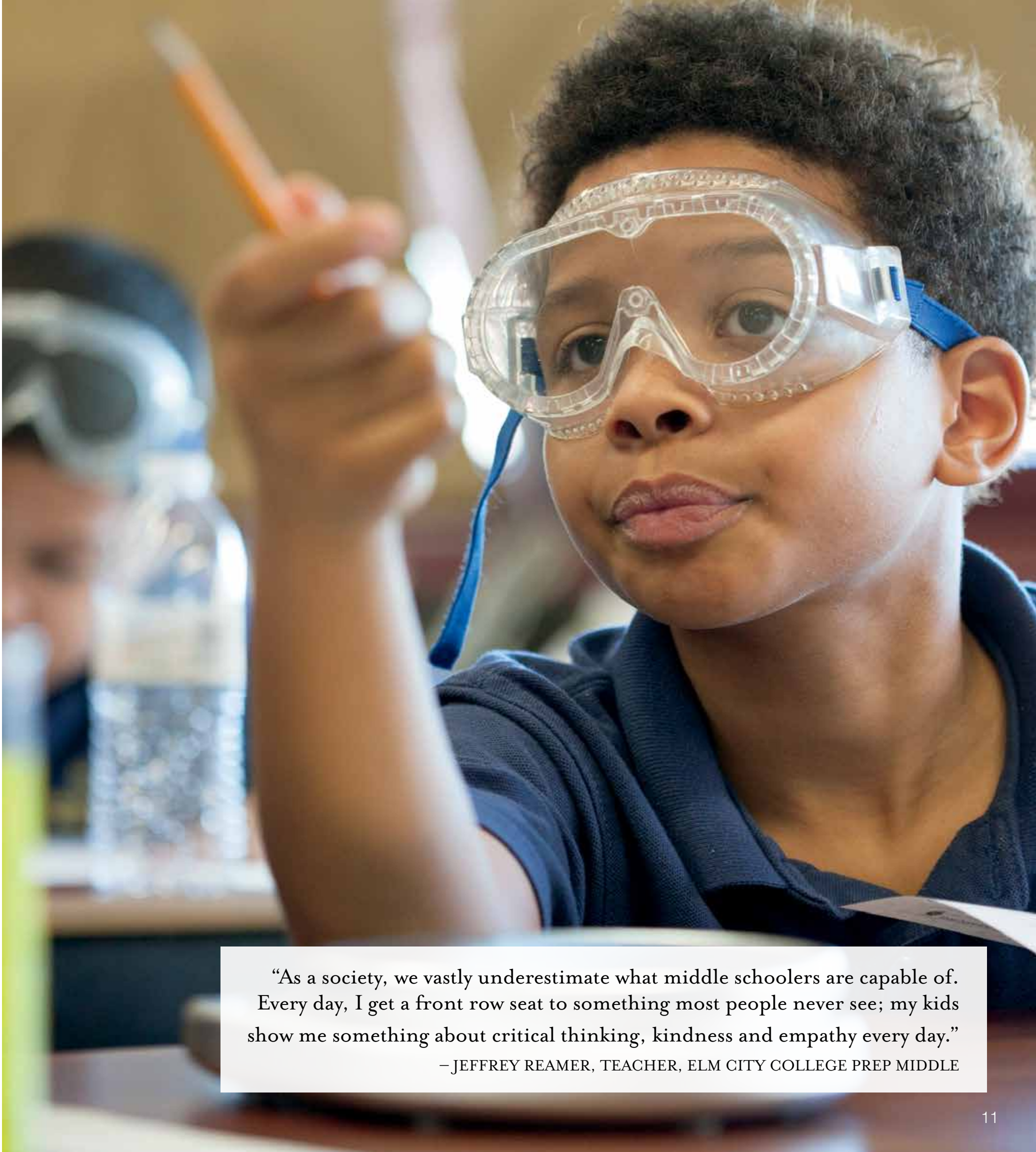
EQUITY

100% of students are admitted by blind lottery

98% of students are African-American or Latino

85% of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch

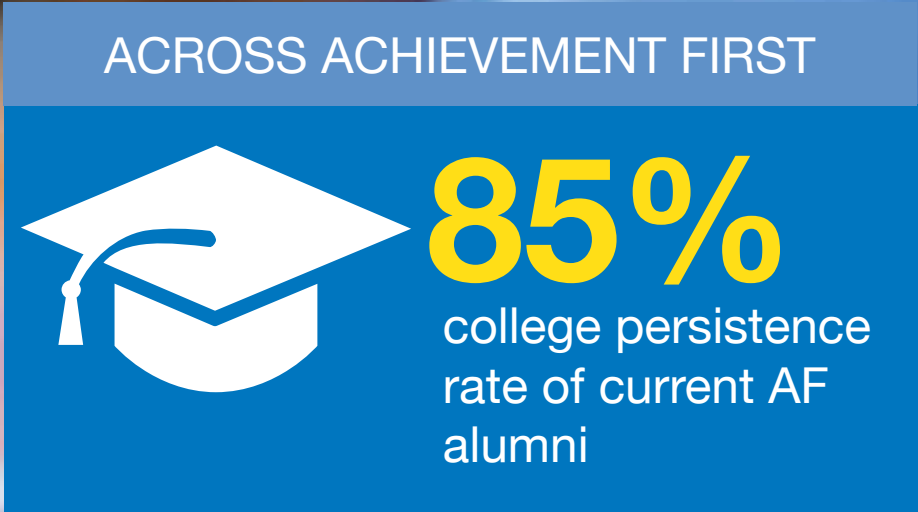
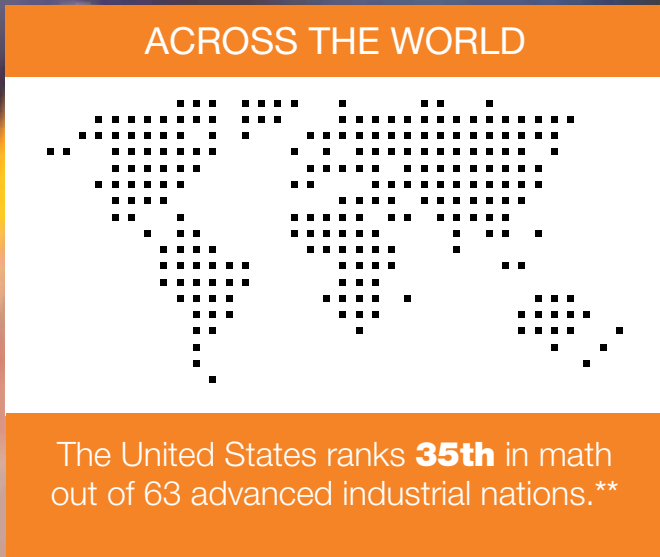
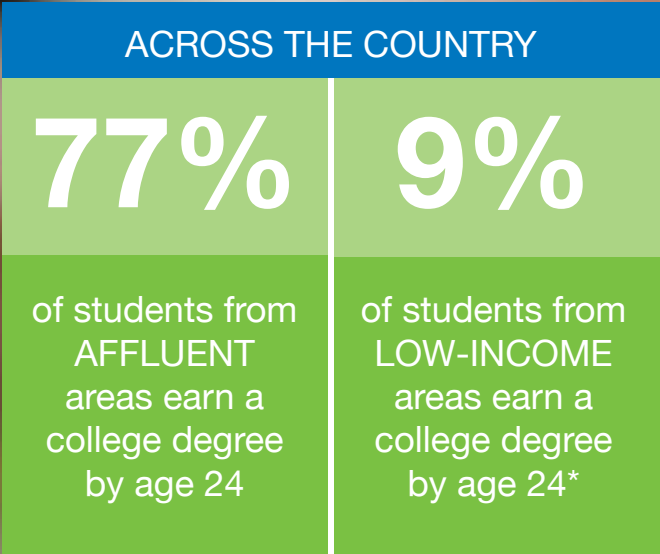
85% of our high school graduates are the first in their families to attend college



“As a society, we vastly underestimate what middle schoolers are capable of. Every day, I get a front row seat to something most people never see; my kids show me something about critical thinking, kindness and empathy every day.”
– JEFFREY REAMER, TEACHER, ELM CITY COLLEGE PREP MIDDLE

In Focus: Closing the Achievement Gap

Our country has failed to live up to the promise of equal education for all students: low-income students and students of color significantly trail their more affluent peers, and students in the United States continue to fall behind their international peers. At Achievement First, we are committed to closing the achievement gap and preparing students to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.



In Focus: Innovation and the AF Greenfield Model

At Achievement First, we are constantly asking ourselves, “what will it take for our schools and our students to make real breakthroughs?” This year, we piloted our Greenfield model—a design that reimagines school—at Elm City College Prep Middle and AF Bridgeport Academy Elementary. In 2015-16, we look forward to launching our Greenfield program at Elm City College Prep Elementary and Middle. If the results and student experience in the Greenfield program are as positive as we believe they will be, we look forward to leveraging these new ideas across our entire network of schools.

“My son made so much progress! It’s like a light came on.”
– LaRHONDA, PARENT, AF GREENFIELD FIFTH-GRADE PILOT PARTICIPANT

With our Greenfield program, we aim to achieve four outcomes:



ACCELERATED ACADEMICS

Our students will be among the best prepared in the world. They will achieve the kind of academic excellence that will ensure they rank amongst the top students in the world on international assessments and perform at high levels in our country’s top universities.



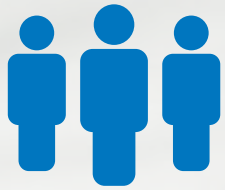
HABITS OF SUCCESS

We know our students’ long-term success requires even more than world-class academic knowledge and skills. Our students will truly thrive when they also develop the habits, mindsets and life skills that promote productive and joyful lives: personal growth, drive, empathy, gratitude, teamwork and curiosity.



EXCELLENCE IN ENRICHMENT

Our students will have the opportunity to pursue excellence outside of traditional academics in music, dance, martial arts and STEM Inventions. They will have a chance to experience the joy that comes from passionately pursuing and building expertise in their chosen craft. In addition, students will participate in regular Expeditions that will engage them in more experiential learning inside and outside the school walls.



STUDENT, FAMILY & STAFF MOTIVATION

Our students, staff and families will exhibit an unstoppable level of shared commitment and drive—consistently going the extra mile to inspire each other to push on in pursuit of their dreams. They will all truly love school and feel like integral and valued members of a powerful school community.

Opening More Gap-Closing Schools

In the 2015-16 school year, our high-performing network has grown to 30 schools and 10,600 students. Over the last two years, we have opened at least one school in each of our three states. However, parent demand still exceeds school supply. Achievement First schools receive far more lottery applications than there are open seats.

NUMBER OF LOTTERY APPLICATIONS PER OPEN SEAT



CT



NY



RI

In New Haven, our schools received 10 lottery applications per open seat.

DAILY NEWS

EXCLUSIVE: Charter school operator Achievement First receives record 21,000 applications for only 1,000 seats.

May 1, 2015

IN 2014-2015, WE OPENED FOUR NEW SCHOOLS:

BROOKLYN



BROOKLYN



BROOKLYN



HARTFORD



OPENING IN PROVIDENCE IN 2015-16:



In Focus: The Achievement First Approach

Our approach to education starts with a clear vision. Every day, we are preparing our students for bright futures as college graduates. Our school days are filled with joyful, rigorous instruction as well as enrichment classes including art, dance, music and drama.

We work to help our students reach their college dreams by focusing on **six key elements**:

- **An Unwavering Focus on Student Achievement**
- **Talent Development**
- **More Time Spent Learning**
- **A Rigorous, Common-Core Aligned Curriculum**
- **The Strategic Use of Data**
- **Strong School Cultures**



Our extended school day and year amount to an extra year of learning over the course of a K-12 education.

“Our teachers work incredibly hard. We are dedicated to making sure all of our kids are going to be successful in college, and so that’s what we think about all the time.”

– MIKE ROSSKAMM, PRINCIPAL, AF BUSHWICK MIDDLE

Concentrating our Impact

As our network of high-performing schools has grown, so has our impact in the communities we serve. As an organization, we have made an intentional choice to deepen our growth in the cities we serve, rather than broadening our growth into other geographies. Parents and families have delivered a clear message: Achievement First schools are making a difference in Brooklyn, Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Providence. We are committed to doing our part to help ensure all children have access to the great public schools they deserve.



Bridgeport: 2 schools
Hartford: 4 schools
New Haven: 5 schools

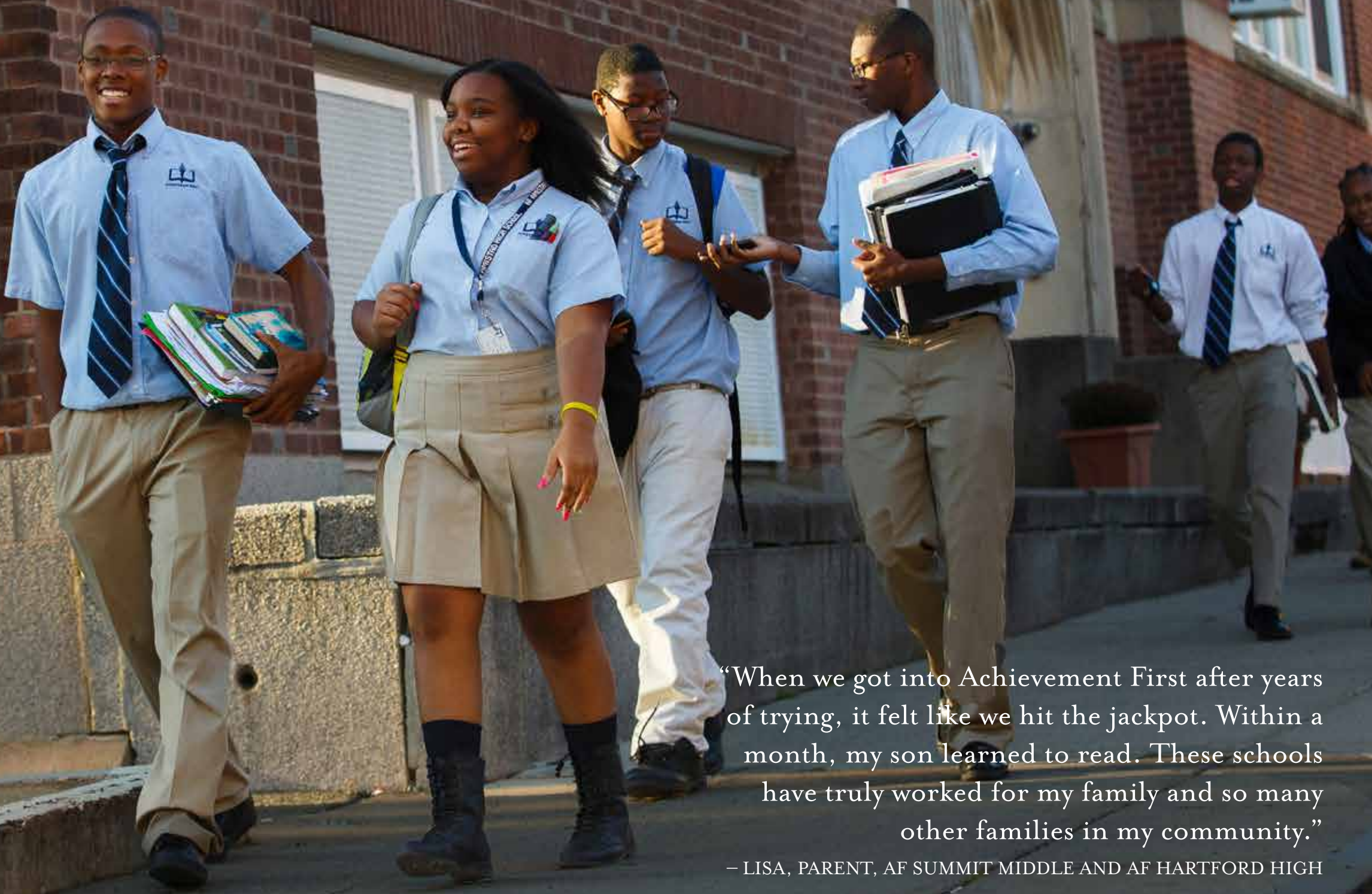


Brooklyn: 17 schools



Providence: 2 schools

In East New York alone, we now have six AF schools serving 13% of the overall K-8 East New York student body.



“When we got into Achievement First after years of trying, it felt like we hit the jackpot. Within a month, my son learned to read. These schools have truly worked for my family and so many other families in my community.”

— LISA, PARENT, AF SUMMIT MIDDLE AND AF HARTFORD HIGH

Sharing with and Learning from Others

Even as our schools and network grow in size, we will still only serve a portion of public school students in need of a high-quality education. By partnering with others, we sharpen our own approach, exchange best practices to broaden our collective impact and help ensure that as many students as possible have access to the great education they deserve.

RESIDENCY PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: A District-Charter Partnership

Through the Residency Program for School Leadership, Achievement First partners with Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven Public Schools to train and support future principals. Aspiring Achievement First leaders also participate in the program, learning from highly-skilled district principals. The program includes:

- Experiential residencies in both an AF and a district school
- Cutting-edge workshops and seminars
- Intensive individualized coaching



“The Residency Program for School Leadership has given me an opportunity to lead change. I am now equipped with the skills to impact the lives of students in a meaningful way and help them see that they can be successful and achieve beyond their expectations.”

— LEONARDO WATSON, PRINCIPAL
FRANK T. SIMPSON-WAVERLY SCHOOL
HARTFORD



Sharing with and Learning from Others

CHARTER NETWORK ACCELERATOR

Together with YES Prep and Aspire Public Schools, Achievement First has launched the second cohort of the Charter Network Accelerator—an innovative program focused on helping experienced leaders, with an emphasis on leaders of color, in designing and growing their networks of public charter schools. The program focuses on early-stage CMOs with three to seven schools and helps them scale with excellence.



2 cohorts

19 public CMO leaders, the majority of whom are leaders of color

25,000+ students at 75+ schools

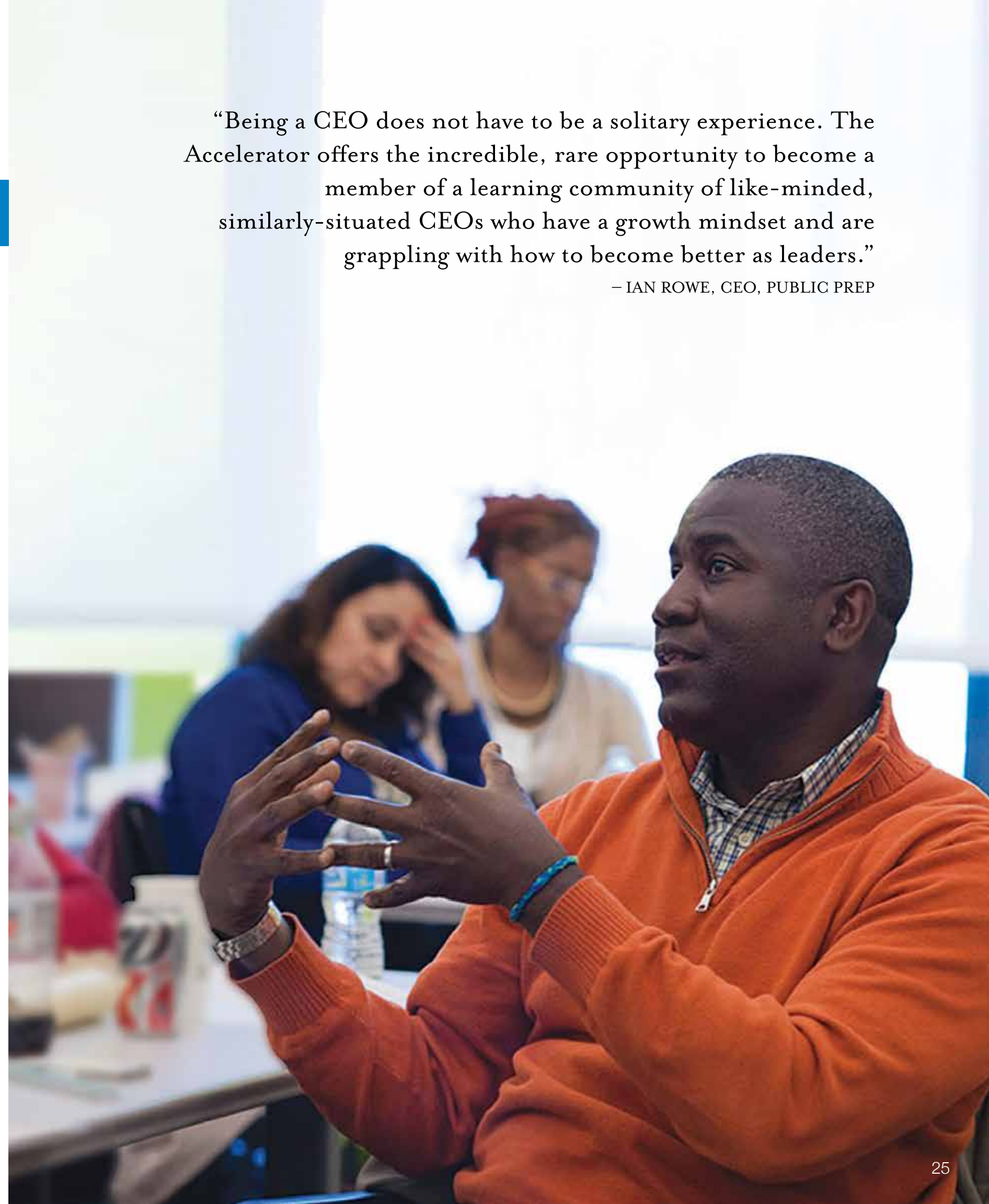
12 states and the District of Columbia

“The Charter Network Accelerator will be a game changer in the improvement of my network of schools.”

— ERIC MAHMOUD, CEO, HARVEST NETWORK OF SCHOOLS


“Being a CEO does not have to be a solitary experience. The Accelerator offers the incredible, rare opportunity to become a member of a learning community of like-minded, similarly-situated CEOs who have a growth mindset and are grappling with how to become better as leaders.”

— IAN ROWE, CEO, PUBLIC PREP



In Focus: Connecticut

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



CONNECTICUT

Highlights from Inside Our Schools

100% of AF Amistad High students who took the A.P. Calculus Exam achieved a passing score, earning college credit.

AF Summit Middle, our newest Hartford school, is fostering a love of reading. After reading and discussing a passage about the annual running of the bulls in Spain, the school started its own tradition called the "Running of the Books."

Our first cohort of AF Bridgeport Middle alumni graduated from our New Haven high school, earning acceptances to colleges including Bates College, Brown University and Wesleyan University.



“With the help and guidance of her teachers, my second-grader has even exceeded my own expectations. She has been given difficult academic work and she has excelled.”
— DEIRDRE, PARENT, ELM CITY COLLEGE PREP ELEMENTARY



In Focus: New York

Across our 17 schools in Brooklyn, students, parents and teachers are working together and making outstanding academic progress in climbing the mountain to college and beyond.



NEW YORK Highlights from Inside Our Schools

AF Brownsville Middle teacher Stephanie Sun was one of four teachers nationwide awarded the 2015 Fishman Prize for Superlative Classroom Practice, a prestigious honor recognizing the nation's most effective teachers working in high-poverty public schools.

At Achievement First, parents are partners. AF Apollo Elementary earned national media attention for its "Letters to Our Sons" program, which cultivates relationships between students, fathers and male caregivers, and the school community.

AF Brooklyn High students earned more than 400 acceptances to colleges and universities including three Ivy League schools: Brown University, Cornell University and Dartmouth College.




“I come from a single-parent home in Bed-Stuy. I am going to one of the most prestigious colleges in the country.”

– MAKAILA, STUDENT, AF BROOKLYN HIGH '15 & STANFORD UNIVERSITY '19



In Focus: Rhode Island

After a successful 2013 school opening, our first Rhode Island school, Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy Elementary, has grown into an outstanding elementary school serving grades K-3. Our second school in Rhode Island is opening this year.



RHODE ISLAND

Highlights from Inside Our Schools

Our students know they are college bound. Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy Elementary second-graders visited the University of Rhode Island where they spoke with a professor, toured the campus and enjoyed a meal in the dining hall.

After Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy Elementary's first year, 91 percent of kindergartners and 98 percent of first graders were reading at or above grade level.

In 2015-16, we are opening our second Rhode Island school, Achievement First Illuminar Mayoral Academy Elementary.



“I can’t really find the words to describe my thoughts or feelings about how much I love this school. If I had to go back to kindergarten, I would choose this school without any hesitation.”

– JUNIOR, PARENT, ACHIEVEMENT FIRST PROVIDENCE MAYORAL ACADEMY ELEMENTARY



Get Involved

✓ **VISIT A SCHOOL**
bit.ly/VisitAF

✓ **BE AN ADVOCATE**
bit.ly/AdvocateAF

✓ **DONATE**
bit.ly/GiveAF

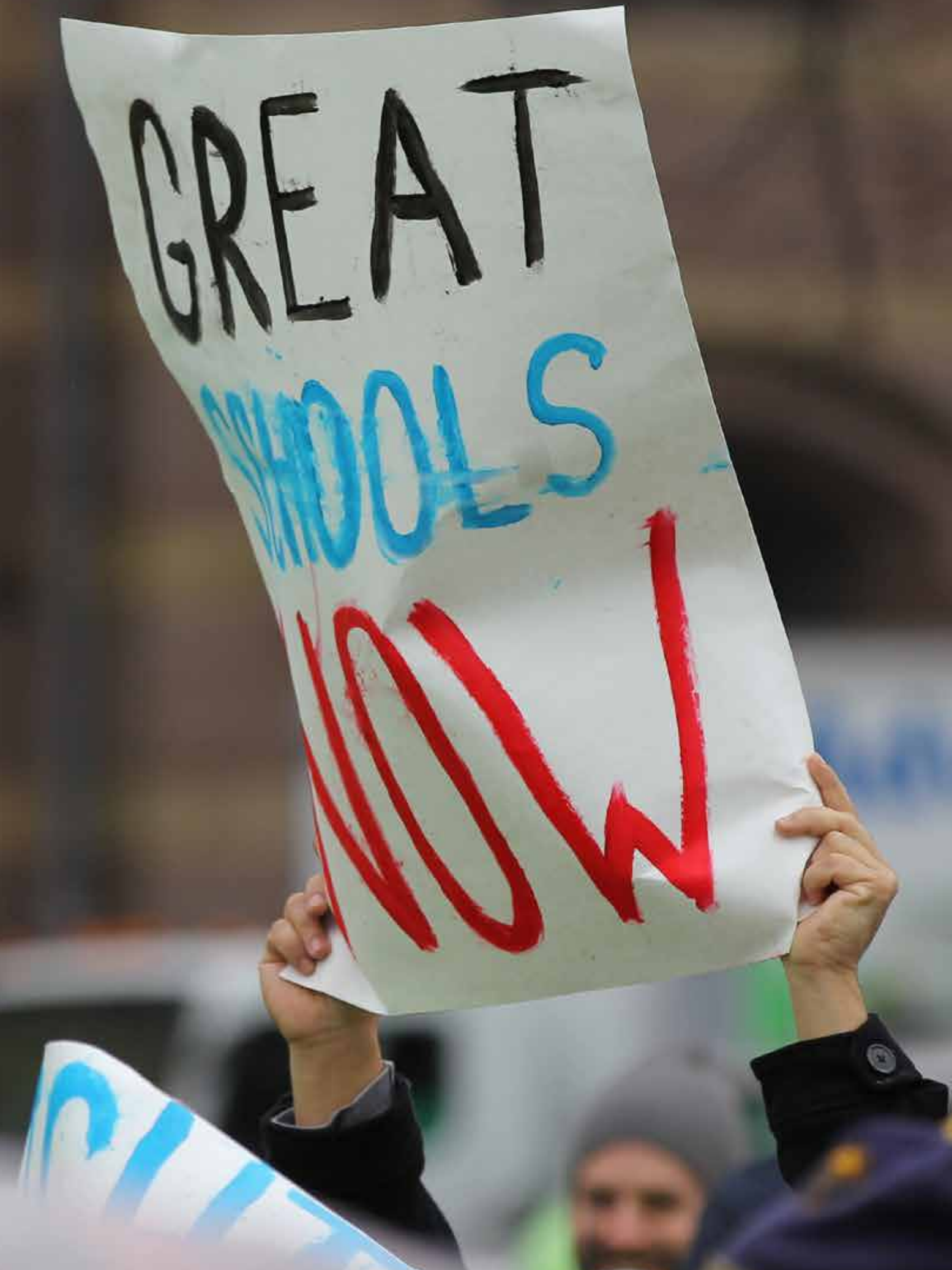
✓ **WORK AT AF**
bit.ly/WorkatAF

✓ **STAY CONNECTED**



@achievement1st
achievementfirst.org

Link addresses are case sensitive.



Facilities Highlights



AF AMISTAD HIGH—NEW BUILDING

AF Amistad High moved to its **state-of-the-art new home**, where it now has room for 550 students as well as science labs, an indoor gym and an outdoor turf sports field. The **\$35 million project**, which was 69% funded by the state, also includes **exterior-facing images, developed in collaboration with the community, that celebrate 16 civil rights leaders.**

AF BRIDGEPORT ACADEMY ELEMENTARY—ADDITION

- A **10,000 square-foot addition** was completed, including a new gym, cafeteria and additional classrooms to accommodate a full K-4 school.
- \$525,000 of this project's construction dollars were awarded to **Bridgeport-based local businesses.**
- 58% of trade costs were awarded to **minority-owned businesses.**



ACHIEVEMENT FIRST PROVIDENCE MAYORAL ACADEMY—RENOVATION

- We completed the final stage of a **three-year renovation** to transform the building for Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy Elementary and ultimately accommodate students in grades K-8.
- \$440,000 of this project's construction dollars were awarded **to local companies.**
- 51% of trade costs were awarded to **minority-owned businesses.**

AF UNIVERSITY PREP HIGH—RELOCATION

In the 2015-16 school year, AF University Prep High is moving to 35 Starr Street in Bushwick, where we will work on a significant renovation to an existing district building, including improvements to ceilings and bathrooms, new lockers and painting to make it a joyful space for teaching and learning.



Finances

CORE OPERATIONS*	
Revenues	
Management fees.....	\$13,268,492
Public grants.....	\$355,978
Philanthropy.....	\$3,101,175
Other.....	\$89,981
Total revenues.....	\$16,815,626
CORE EXPENSES	
Personnel expenses.....	
Non-personnel expenses.....	\$3,493,723
Total expenses.....	\$16,701,448
Surplus/(deficit).....	\$114,178

ACCELERATE INITIATIVES**	
Accelerate Revenues.....	
Accelerate Expenses	
Personnel expenses.....	\$3,101,014
Non-personnel expenses.....	\$3,872,381
Total expenses.....	\$6,973,395
Accelerate net surplus/(deficit).....	\$153,131

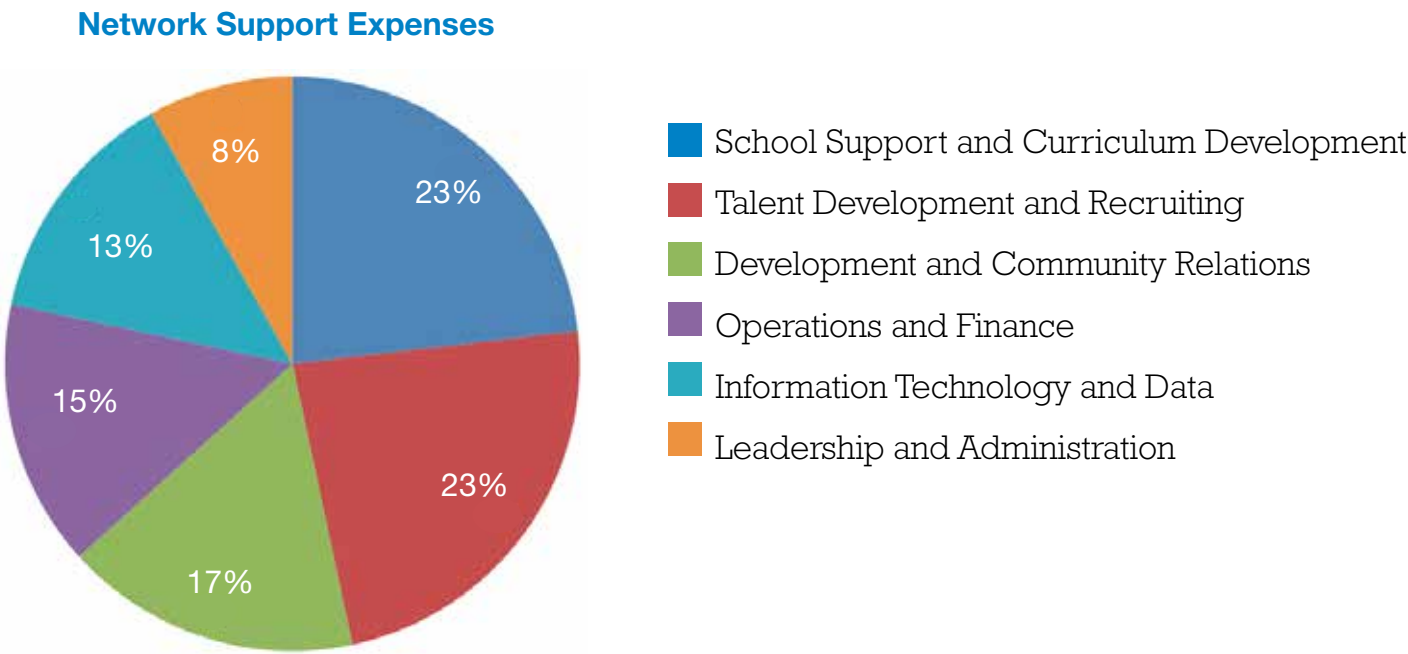
*Core operations include the revenue and services provided for in the management agreement between AF and its schools and include AF's key activities in support of our K-12 program.

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

OUR SCHOOL FINANCES		
(amount per pupil for 2013-2014)		
	NY	CT
District spending per pupil*.....	\$15,366	\$13,878
Revenues per pupil**		
Philanthropy	\$-	\$2,172
Federal.....	\$526	\$380
State/district	\$14,650	\$11,020
Total per pupil revenues.....	\$15,176	\$13,572
Expenses per pupil**		
Personnel.....	\$11,370	\$9,358
Non-personnel.....	\$3,626	\$3,701
Total per pupil expenses.....	\$14,996	\$13,059

*Controlled for services provided in kind (facilities, transportation, food services, debt and pension costs).

**Data included for AF's fully grown schools only (Amistad Academy Elementary, Amistad Academy Middle, Elm City College Prep Elementary, Elm City College Prep Middle, AF Bridgeport Academy Middle, AF Hartford Academy Elementary, AF Hartford Academy Middle, AF Crown Heights Elementary, AF Crown Heights Middle, AF Bushwick Elementary, AF Bushwick Middle, AF Endeavor Elementary, AF Endeavor Middle and AF Brownsville Elementary).



Donors



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.

Anonymous	William Cohen	Carolyn Greenspan and Marshall Ruben
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The William H. Pitt Foundation, Inc.

“Achievement First has provided thousands of students with a rigorous and joyful place to learn and to grow. As a dynamic and self-aware organization, AF continually challenges itself and demonstrates that we can all benefit from working hard and striving to be better at what we do.”
– CHARLES BUICE, PRESIDENT, TIGER FOUNDATION



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Really Good Stuff
True Benefit, LLC
Yale New Haven Hospital
Yale University

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A talented and experienced group of professionals comprise Achievement First's Network Support Board of Directors and our school-facing boards. Our boards' expertise in multiple fields allows them to provide strong governance and oversight for our schools.

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Chairman and CEO, WR. Berkley Corporation

Doug Borchard, Treasurer

Managing Partner and Chief Operating Officer, New Profit, Inc.

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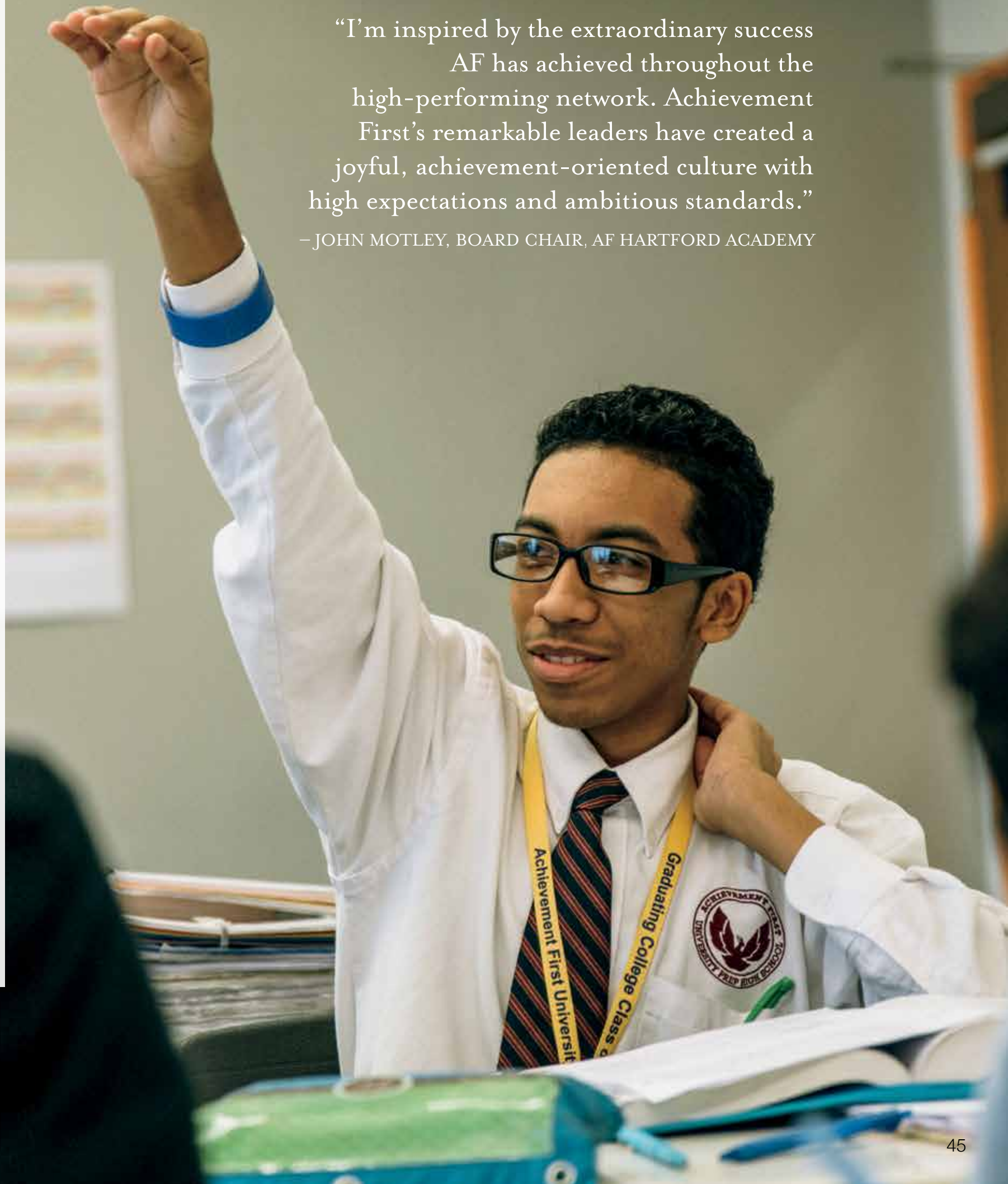
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