



Achievement First

20
YEARS



Achievement First Amistad High School
 Achievement First Apollo Elementary School
 Achievement First Apollo Middle School
 Achievement First Aspire Elementary School
 Achievement First Aspire Middle School
 Achievement First Bridgeport Academy Elementary School
 Achievement First Bridgeport Academy Middle School
 Achievement First Brooklyn High School
 Achievement First Brownsville Elementary School
 Achievement First Brownsville Middle School
 Achievement First Bushwick Elementary School
 Achievement First Bushwick Middle School
 Achievement First Crown Heights Elementary School
 Achievement First Crown Heights Middle School
 Achievement First East Brooklyn High School
 Achievement First East New York Elementary School
 Achievement First East New York Middle School
 Achievement First Endeavor Elementary School
 Achievement First Endeavor Middle School
 Achievement First Hartford Academy Elementary School
 Achievement First Hartford High School
 Achievement First Hartford Summit Middle School
 Achievement First Iluminar Mayoral Academy Elementary School
 Achievement First Iluminar Mayoral Academy Middle School
 Achievement First Linden Elementary School
 Achievement First Linden Middle School
 Achievement First North Brooklyn Prep Elementary School
 Achievement First North Brooklyn Prep Middle School
 Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy Elementary School
 Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy Middle School
 Achievement First University Prep High School
 Achievement First Voyager Elementary School
 Achievement First Voyager Middle School
 Amistad Academy Elementary School
 Amistad Academy Middle School
 Elm City College Prep Elementary School
 Elm City College Prep Middle School

Dear Friends,

Twenty years ago, we asked 84 students, their families, and seven teachers to join us and take a leap of faith as the founding team of Amistad Academy. Together, with a lot of love and hard work, we built a school that would go on to post the greatest performance gains of any school in Connecticut and ultimately, to inspire a 37-school network.

For two decades, Achievement First schools have proved what is possible when potential meets opportunity. We have shown what happens when ALL students are given access to outstanding teaching, high expectations, and a school culture of belief and belonging. We have helped change the conversation about what we can accomplish in public education. Our scholars—predominantly Black, Latinx, and low-income students—are achieving at the same high levels as their affluent peers in New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. And it’s not just academics. They’re also excelling at speech and debate, sports, robotics, art, theater, band, dance—and kindness, self-advocacy, friendship, and making the world a better place. They are just getting started, and so are we.

Achievement First has always been deeply committed to being open source, learning from others, and doing what we can to help others who are addressing unequal educational opportunity in our country. In addition to sharing all our curriculum and resources for free online, AF Accelerate has launched several partnership initiatives. These include a cohort program that guides early-stage charter networks toward scaling with excellence and a leadership development program that supports schools and networks implementing our rigorous curricula. We now serve 14,000 students in AF schools and more than 40,000 additional students through this AF Accelerate work.

Our success is possible not only because of what we do here, but also because of who we are. Last year, we brought together students, parents, and staff from across our schools to determine the shared, core values we need for the next chapter of Achievement First. We talked about what already makes us special and what we need to change. We are excited to share our new values—which are deliberately action-oriented—with you in these pages: Lead for Racial Equity, Strive for Excellence, Embrace Challenge, Care for the Whole Person, Choose Joy, and Go Further Together.

Through the stories of our teachers, leaders, students, parents, and alumni, we hope to give you a glimpse of the most important force fueling Achievement First’s accomplishments these past 20 years: our people. And that includes you. As we reflect on the power of the last 20 years and dream of what Achievement First will accomplish in the next 20, we are humbled and deeply grateful. Without your generous support, this would not be possible. We cannot thank you enough for the faith you have in AF, in our scholars, and in the future we will build together.

With love,



Dacia M. Toll
Co-CEO and President



Doug McCurry
Co-CEO and Superintendent



Andrew Boas
Board Chair





AF exists to address the legacy of racism in education. We look at ourselves first. We reflect and talk about the role race plays in our work, experiences, and decisions. We strive to be constantly anti-racist in our words and actions. Our students deserve nothing less.

LEAD FOR RACIAL EQUITY

We seek to disrupt a system that results in only 9% of students from low-income families earning a college degree by age 24. Our students' six-year college graduation rate is 53%—almost six times that national average—and we're working hard to ensure that rate grows until it equals, then surpasses, the graduation rate of our country's most affluent students.

We believe that realizing educational equity is a moral and economic imperative. We believe in the importance of a diverse team and in ensuring the adults in our buildings reflect the backgrounds of our students; this year 59% of our school staff identify as Black, Latinx, multi-racial, or first-generation college students. We are continuing to evolve our school design to create a culture of belief and belonging and an enrichment-oriented instructional model that will unleash the full potential of the students we serve.

“No one is going to tell me what I can and cannot do. A formula couldn’t tell me who I was and who I could become.”

Chandler started at AF Brooklyn High when she was only 12 years old. In 10th grade, she got into the Smith College summer program. That moment showed her how much potential she had. The next summer, she was accepted into Cornell’s pre-college program and set a goal to apply early decision.

Chandler believes that to grow, you have to recognize that there will be challenges. One of those challenges was a college matching tool that predicted her chances of getting into Cornell were very slim. But Chandler doesn’t let anyone tell her what she’s capable of. Chandler graduated from Cornell University with her bachelor’s degree in English in the spring of this year.

Now, Chandler is working at CityMD and is enrolled in a post-bacc program at Fordham University to prepare for medical school—she’s considering Columbia, NYU, Drexel, or Yale for her next steps. Wherever she goes, she won’t let any barriers get in her way.

Chandler
Alumna





STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE

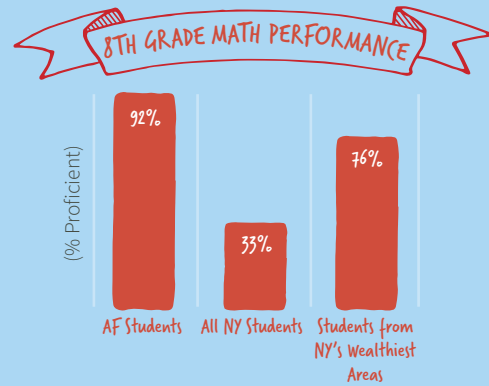
We set ambitious goals and don't stop until we achieve them. Then, we set new goals. That's how we became one of the top-performing charter networks in the country. We set high expectations because our students

can exceed them. The results speak for themselves: our students come from historically low-income and underserved communities, and they routinely achieve on par with their affluent peers. And our commitment to excellence goes beyond academics: our students are thriving in their extracurriculars, too, so that they're prepared for success in college and beyond.

During high school, 95% of AF students complete an internship, pre-college program, or summer enrichment program before graduation. More than half of our students are admitted to colleges ranked "highly" or "most selective." And once they're admitted to college, only 10% of AF students need to take remedial classes, compared to 63% of students from low-income families nationally. This is what access to opportunity—and what excellence and equity—can mean.

OUR RESULTS

➔ New York



Our results add up. Our eighth-graders not only outperformed the New York statewide average, they also outscored the students in the state's wealthiest areas—including Chappaqua, Rye, and Scarsdale—by 16 percentage points.



Our students make their voices heard. Students in the Speech and Debate program at AF Brooklyn High have won the State Championship and placed third, ninth, and 11th across three national championships. What's more, some of their winning speeches are powerful testaments to their identities and a call for change in our country. In an elite environment that is overwhelmingly white and affluent, they are literally changing the debate.



We're achieving excellence—nationwide. Achievement First Bushwick has been named a 2019 National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. This is a first for our network, and AF Bushwick is among only 362 schools to receive this prestigious honor this year.

All kids can. AF students are scoring at double the proficiency rates of their peers in our host districts. It shows what we all know—kids can achieve incredible things when you give them the opportunity to do so.

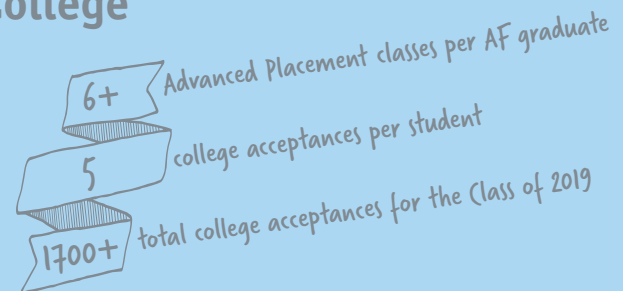


AF students are college-ready.



Students at AF University Prep High score an average of 1126 on the SAT, outperforming both their peers from similar backgrounds (990) and the national average (1068).

➔ AF To College



AF alumni—including Amadi and Aaliyah, pictured at Wellesley College—attend some of the nation's most elite colleges.



➔ Connecticut

Our high schools are among the best in the state.

U.S. News & World Report named AF Hartford High #3 in Connecticut, and AF Amistad High ranked #12 out of over 200 schools!



Even as we raise the bar, we get stronger.

Since the state began Common Core-aligned assessments in 2015, our students have improved their proficiency rates by 21% points in math and by 15% points in ELA.



Advanced is the new proficient.

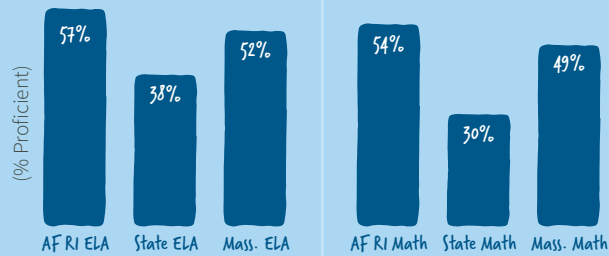
More of our elementary schoolers are scoring advanced than any other level on state assessments. That's because "proficient" has never been the goal—our students and teachers are aiming for mastery.



Enrichment matters. The innovative enrichment program at Elm City College Prep Elementary builds activities like soccer, robotics, and band into the regular school day. That's part of the reason why the school became the first in the state to compete as a travel team for South Central Premier in the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association!

➔ Rhode Island

AVERAGE ELA/MATH PERFORMANCE



We're raising the bar. Last year, our student outperformed their in-state peers at such a wide margin that we committed to benchmark our Rhode Island results against those of Massachusetts, which is widely considered to have one of the best school systems in the country. The results are in—our kids in the Ocean State are outperforming the state average of our Bay State neighbors by 5% points in ELA and math.



We meet all students where they are, while also holding high expectations.

English Language Learners at AF Rhode Island score proficient and above at five times the rate of their peers across the state.



“I think our founding students’ journey is an emphatic statement that kids can achieve great things when they have the opportunity.”

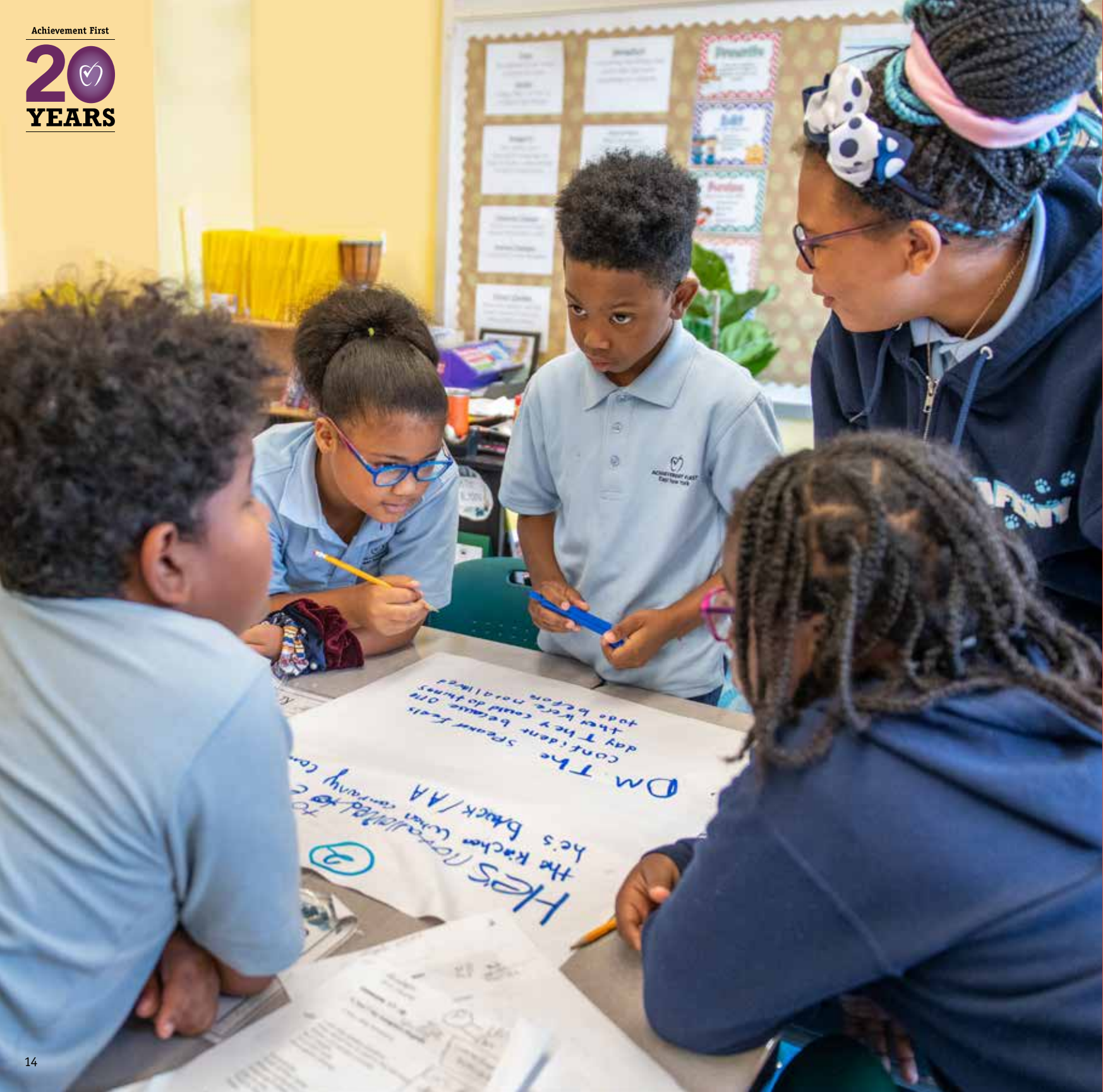
Four hundred sixty-seven is an important number for Kevin Lohela. It’s the number of students who attend AF Illuminar Elementary, the standout school he founded as principal. He knows all of their names.

This isn’t an accident or a magic trick; it’s something that is incredibly important to Kevin. For him, it’s the starting place of any meaningful relationship. It’s an acknowledgement of his deep belief that every person possesses unique gifts and potential. At his school, he views it as the first step toward transformative achievement, which can only be realized with a strong team and community.

And what does excellence look like at AF Illuminar Elementary? Most of the school’s founding first-graders came in testing at the pre-reading level. When they took the Rhode Island state test as third-graders, they achieved the best results in the state for ELA (English Language Arts) and math. This is an especially notable accomplishment, since a majority of the class are English Language Learners. The same students who didn’t know all their letters are now writing incredible essays with voice, nuance, and marshaled evidence. They are showing what can happen when a community of believers invests in the potential of all kids.

Kevin Lohela
Principal





EMBRACE CHALLENGE

We grow when we're challenged. That's why we welcome mistakes and challenges as opportunities to learn and get better. When we found our alumni were not persisting in college at the high rates we aspire to, we didn't shy away from those numbers—we dove in. In that deep dive, we found gaps in how we prepared our students that went

beyond academics. We realized we hadn't yet exposed our scholars to the many areas of interest they could be inspired to pursue in college and in life. Greenfield, now in its fifth year, is a model that allows us to leverage technology and brain science to do more self-directed learning, build our students' social-emotional strength intentionally, and offer expeditions that allow students to pursue fields of study that match their personal interests. It's also the third year of our Empower program, which we created to better serve students with highest-need disabilities.

And perhaps our biggest challenge as a public charter school is the funding and facilities inequity we face. Our

Connecticut students receive \$4,000 less per pupil than the state average, even though our schools serve some of the highest-need students. Our Rhode Island students face facilities inequities that make it hard for us to open schools. Our staff and families are leaning into this challenge as we call on our elected officials to make needed change.

We set out to prove that the income of your family or the zip code you live in should not determine your destiny.



1999

Amistad Academy

With the support of local legislators who secured a special funding appropriation, our first school opens to 84 fifth- and sixth-graders with a three-week Summer Academy in 1999.



2002

Amistad Academy graduates its first class. Our students have improved more than 40 percentage points on the Connecticut Mastery Test—far more than any other cohort of students in the state—and they perform at the same level as students from Greenwich.



2004

The New Haven Register names our staff as their first-ever “Person of the Year,” and we are the centerpiece of a nationally-televised PBS documentary called “Closing the Achievement Gap.” We open our second school, Elm City College Prep, and the Achievement First network is born.



84 students

Brooklyn schools

At the request of New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, we open three Brooklyn schools: AF Crown Heights Elementary and Middle, and AF East New York Elementary. We are working to prove gap-closing student success is possible at scale.



AF Crown Heights and AF East New York receive all A's on NYC's progress report. Both schools rank in the top 4% of all NYC schools, and AF East New York is the fourth-highest performing school in NYC. We also open our first school in Bridgeport.

2006

To better serve our middle school graduates, we open our first high school—AF Amistad High in New Haven.



2007



2008

With the support of Hartford Superintendent Steven Adamowski, AF receives a charter to open our first Hartford elementary and middle school.



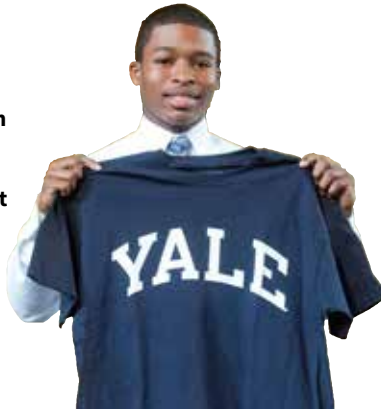
2009

With the Residency Program for School Leadership, AF commits to increasing our impact by sharing what we have learned with other schools. Our partnership work expands into what is now known as AF Accelerate.

2010

Rhode Island schools

At the urging of Rhode Island Education Commissioner Deborah Gist to “prove what is possible” in the Ocean State, we open our first Rhode Island school. We're also named one of three finalists for the Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools for the first time.



2013

2005

890 students

2,000 students

5,000 students

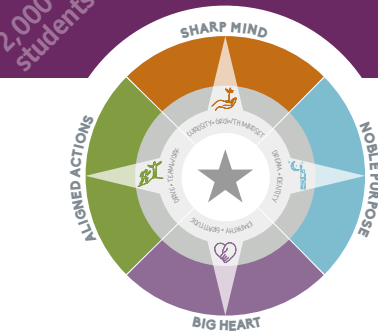
AF launches the Charter Network Accelerator to support, learn from, and scale smaller CMOs.



We've overhauled both our curriculum and teacher and leader training in response to the Common Core. Our test scores are on the rise. In New York, our students' combined ELA and math score outperform the average for students from middle- and upper-income families. We also introduce “AP for All” for our high school students.

2015

Greenfield



After a smaller pilot in 2015, we launch our Greenfield program at Elm City College Prep to increase student independence, investment, and choice. AF announces a commitment to being fully open source and is the first, large CMO to make all of our curriculum materials accessible via our website.

2016

The AF Bushwick Empower Program, our intensive program serving students with highest-need disabilities, opens. We also launch Navigator, a new partnership program to support schools and networks implement AF open source curricula.



2017



In its first year of state testing, AF Illuminar Elementary ranks as the top performer in all of Rhode Island—#1 in ELA and #1 in math, beating the wealthiest schools in the state by double digits.

2018

We celebrate our 20th year 14,000 students strong across 37 schools in Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island. With our AF Accelerate programs, we reach an additional 40,000 students!

2019

14,000 students

2014

8,165 students

10,000 students



Gloria Achigasim

Parent

After Gloria's older son was born, she was told he might have learning delays. When he started kindergarten at a different school, she was told that he would never be able to read, or, he'd be able to read, but he wouldn't be able to understand what he read. Then, he came to Elm City College Prep.

Now, he's a soccer-obsessed seventh-grader, an empathetic and compassionate middle-schooler who loves to read so much that whenever a book is missing from the classroom, his teacher knows to ask him for it. He can tell you all about plot points and have in-depth discussions about current events. His teachers are there to help him with any social and academic challenges he faces. And Gloria's fifth-grade son? He's advanced in all of his subjects. He shares his older brother's passion for soccer, and he especially thrives in reading, math, and science.

Gloria's sons' experiences have shown her the type of progress that is possible when families and schools partner in support of kids. She celebrates not only their triumphs, but also their challenges and their milestones—she knows they are growing and becoming kind people who will make a difference in the world.

“All of the negatives I was told he might not be able to do, he’s doing them all. It blows my mind. Everyone sees that he’s getting it.”

We share a journey to fulfill our potential as whole people. We support that journey by honoring each other's identities, emotions, and dreams AND by pushing each other from a place of belief and love. This is incredible work.

It's also incredibly hard. That's why we focus on taking care of the people who do it. It's why every teacher has a coach in their corner, why our network provides a strong curriculum, and why we provide more than three weeks of training and PD to our staff every year.

In the classroom, we're piloting social-emotional work to support our students and adults in strengthening their self-awareness, emotional intelligence, empathy, and ability to connect with others. We are also supporting our students in exploring and finding strength in their identities and passions. We've created

a new team focused on student experience to make sure our students develop their personal "whys" that will propel them forward to high school graduation, college, and beyond.

CARE FOR THE WHOLE PERSON





Raina Simmons
Teacher, Dean

If you ask Raina how many years she's been teaching at Achievement First, she doesn't count by calendar year—dates are easy to forget. She remembers each year by the co-teacher she taught with. That's no coincidence; she says the reason she comes back to teach at AF year after year is because of the people.

Her colleagues at AF Hartford Academy Elementary, where she taught fourth grade, are among her closest friends. Her co-teachers became like family. She knows the people she's worked with care deeply for her as a person, which enables her to do her best work. As a first-year teacher, she remembers being shocked by feedback on the many things she needed to be doing better. Her co-teacher gave her a shoulder to cry on and a sounding board so that she could improve. She did.

Last year, she became a master teacher, recognized as one of the strongest educators in the network. Today, she's an academic dean at Elm City College Prep Elementary, where she's developing as a leader and helping teachers feel the same sense of community and growth that she's always felt at Achievement First.

“To me, being a master teacher means I’m providing kids with the education that I wish I had, that I wish my mom had. That gives me a feeling I can’t describe.”

CHOOSE JOY

We choose to see the purpose and joy that is within and around us, and we actively work to spread joy to others throughout each day. We know great teaching alone isn't enough; it needs

to fuel an exceptional student experience—one where students love what they're learning and feel inspired to push their thinking further. We want joy and meaning to be evident in every powerful student-teacher relationship, every math lesson, Socratic Seminar, and science experiment. We want its presence felt in every extracurricular—from theater to lacrosse.

Our teachers and leaders choose joy every day as they lead with love. We take the time to connect, and to express our gratitude for each other and the incredible work we get to do together. And we actively cultivate the curiosity, joy of discovery, and love of learning that our students will carry forward well beyond their time with us.



“I like to help younger kids read tricky words, and sound them out. It makes me happy because I like to help people when they’re stuck.”

To talk with Milani is to meet enthusiasm personified. It’s the glow that she gets when she talks about her personal hero, her cousin Naomi, and her American hero, Rosa Parks. It’s the sparkle in her eye when she explains her love for singing and dancing, or details her strengths in math, social studies, and creative writing. It’s the way she explains how she sets up a pretend classroom at home and uses science for one of her favorite pastimes—making slime.

She wasn’t always so excited about school. When she started kindergarten at Achievement First Bridgeport Academy Elementary, she’d get scared of difficult questions and freeze up if the work was hard. Her teachers helped her learn that it was OK to be nervous and to ask for help. Now, she’s not scared anymore. If she doesn’t know what to do, she raises her hand, asks her question, and gets help for herself and her classmates.

She doesn’t stop there. Now, she uses what she’s learned to help the youngest students in her school become better readers, even when the words are hard. Perhaps more importantly, she shows them that they don’t have to be scared of a challenge.

Milani
Fourth-Grader



We accomplish more together than we can alone. We join forces on big and small things. We do what we say we will do. We make choices with our team and family in mind.

GO FURTHER TOGETHER

And our commitment to collaboration doesn't stop at our 37 schools— it's about all teachers and students. That's why Achievement First's partnership team, born in 2010, has now grown into a more robust division called AF Accelerate that currently supports more than 40,000 students in schools and networks across the country. Over time, this work, which includes our Charter Network Accelerator and Navigator program, has reached over 75,000 students.

Through AF Accelerate, our team of leaders continues to partner with educators nationwide—bringing the same focus and sense of urgency that has propelled our own students' success—to help improve outcomes for students everywhere.





Ezae
Senior

Ezae has been an Achievement First student since fifth grade. He has changed so much in that time, especially since he got to AF University Prep High. During his freshman and sophomore years, he kept to himself, focusing exclusively on his work. Then, in junior year, he joined the honor council, the track and field team, and a fellowship program sponsored by J.P. Morgan. What changed? He saw an opportunity to give back to his school and be more selfless. As an upperclassman, he realized that freshmen were looking up to him—as he once did to the seniors ahead of him—to help grow and improve the school community.

He's had a lot of support as he's made these changes, from his first friend at AF, Elian, to his history teacher, and his mom. They all see something in him that he didn't initially see: potential. So now Ezae works hard for himself AND to make those who believe in him proud.

This year, he'll be in five AP classes, on top of his continued extracurricular involvement. Next year, you might find him at City Tech or SUNY Oswego, before he starts his career as an architect or actor. And after that, we know he'll take his ability to make a difference with him wherever he goes.

“I think it’s important to be a voice for people who feel like they don’t have a voice themselves.”

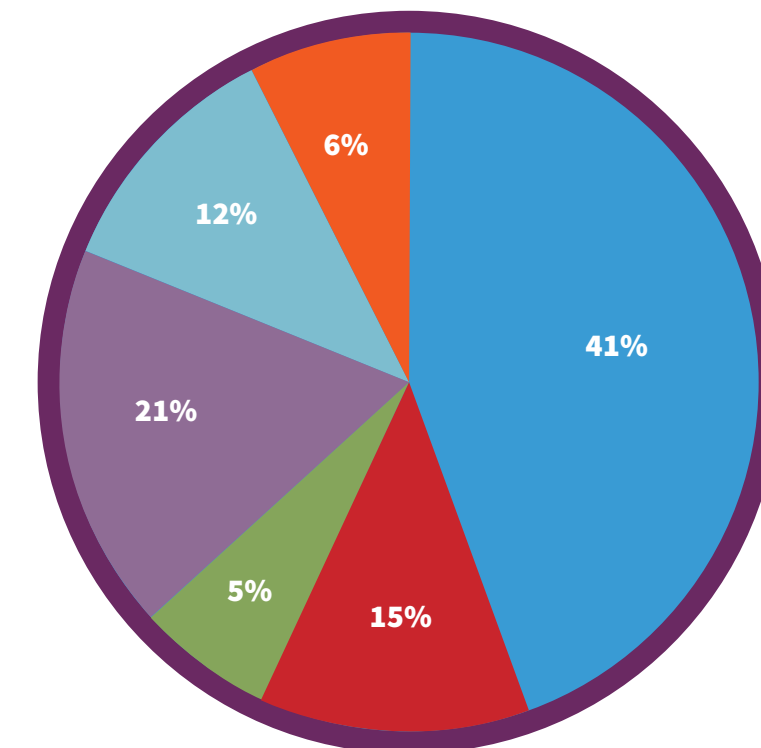
AF is committed to running a K-12 public school network at scale with the same resources that are currently available to our host districts. AF schools pay a 10% Network Support fee to cover the cost of all the central support services the school receives, which is significantly less than the percent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



Our School Finances

	NY	CT	RI
District spending per pupil*	\$20,724	\$17,375	\$18,412
AF revenues per pupil**			
Philanthropy	\$13	\$1,931	\$97
Federal	\$940	\$1,093	\$1,032
State/district	\$17,620	\$11,761	\$15,386
Total per pupil revenues	\$18,574	\$14,784	\$16,516
AF expenses per pupil**			
Personnel	\$12,252	\$10,730	\$10,341
Non-personnel	\$5,577	\$4,137	\$6,002
Total per pupil expenses	\$17,829	\$14,866	\$16,344

* District spending data is the most recent available (from the 2017-18 school year) and is controlled for services provided in kind (facilities, food services, debt, and pension costs).
 **Achievement First data encompasses the 2018-2019 fiscal year and excludes AF programs and schools that are still scaling (AF Aspire Middle, AF Bushwick Empower Program, AF East Brooklyn High, AF Illuminar Middle, AF Linden Middle, AF North Brooklyn Prep Middle, AF Providence Middle, AF Voyager Elementary, AF Voyager Middle).



Network Support Expenses

Core Operations+ Revenues	
Network Support fee	\$24,484,483
Public grants	\$365,331
Philanthropy	\$1,945,000
Other	\$1,743,620
Total revenues	\$28,538,434
Core Expenses	
Personnel expenses	\$23,121,706
Non-personnel expenses	\$4,915,185
Total expenses	\$28,036,890
Surplus/(deficit)	\$501,544

Accelerate Initiatives++	
Accelerate revenues	\$4,844,071
Accelerate expenses	
Personnel expenses	\$3,624,037
Non-personnel expenses	\$1,219,034
Total expenses	\$4,843,071
Accelerate net surplus/(deficit)	\$1,000

+ 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 our "R&D" work with independent sources of funding, such as our Greenfield program.

- School Support and Curriculum Development
- Talent Development and Recruiting
- Development and Community Relations
- Operations and Finance
- Information Technology and Data
- Leadership and Administration

DONORS

INDIVIDUALS

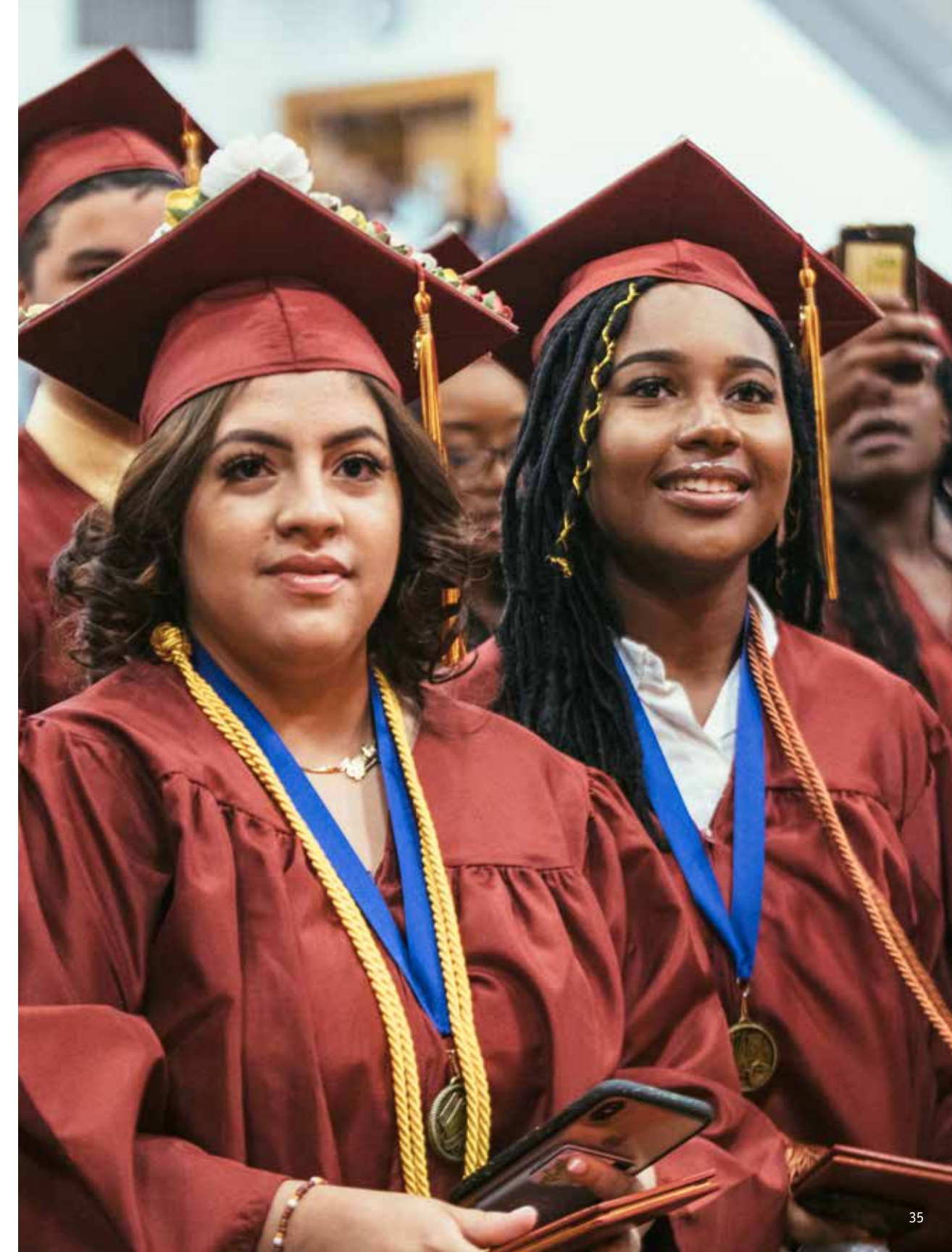
Anonymous
Nancy V. Ahern
Bruce D. Alexander
Jennifer Alexander
James Amine
Diane Ariker
Jonathan and Amy Atkeson
Lee Backus
Percy Ballah
Brian Barkley
Eve and Frank Barron
Michael Barry
Katherine Barth
Ilene and Richard Barth
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James Burt
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Lincoln Caplan and Susan L. Carney
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