

**Achievement First  
Clear Fund Grant Application  
Round One - August 15, 2007**

**I. List of Programs (One Page)**

Achievement First is a charter school management organization started in July 2003 by the leaders of Amistad Academy in New Haven, CT. A nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, the mission of Achievement First is to deliver on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all of America's children by creating exemplary, gap-closing, life-changing public charter schools serving students in grades K-12. Our schools will provide students with the academic and character skills they need to excel in top colleges, succeed in a competitive world, and serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities. Achievement First currently supports twelve academies in New Haven and Bridgeport, CT and Brooklyn, NY, serving nearly 2500 students. Following is a list of the schools, each of which is growing to scale one grade per year:

Connecticut: Amistad Academy, New Haven CT (Elementary Academy, opened 2004; Middle Academy, opened 1999; High School Academy, opened 2006); Elm City College Preparatory, New Haven CT (Elementary Academy, opened 2004; Middle Academy, opened 2004); Achievement First Bridgeport, Bridgeport CT (Middle Academy, opening 2007);

New York: Achievement First Crown Heights, Brooklyn NY (Elementary Academy, opened 2005; Middle Academy, opened 2005); Achievement First East New York, Brooklyn NY (Elementary Academy, opened 2005); Achievement First Endeavor, Brooklyn NY (Middle Academy, opened 2006); Achievement First Bushwick, Brooklyn NY (Elementary Academy, opened 2006; Middle Academy, opening 2007)

The school model, developed first at flagship Amistad Academy, features a rigorous, standards-based academic curriculum centered around 3.5 hours of literacy instruction and 2 hours of math instruction every day, coupled with regular interim assessments and as-needed tutoring to ensure that every student stays on track. Students regularly attend guided reading, phonics, math, writing, history, science, dance, music, physical education and art classes as well. In addition, all AF schools offer an extensive character development program. The REACH principles – Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, and Hard Work – determine classroom and school-wide expectations for good behavior, and students are recognized for positive contributions to the school community.

Our business model anticipates the opening of 2-3 new AF academies each year within a concentrated geography, as well as the establishment of a substantial teacher training and certification program. We are working to build replicable, first-class systems for all central office functions, allowing us to expand efficiently to scale.

The program of focus is the rigorous Saturday Academy tutoring program, a new initiative designed to provide intensive support as our scholars at every AF middle and high school work toward mastery. We are absolutely committed to our goal of preparing all students for success, and following the return of New York State assessment results that for the first time did not meet the standard of growth and excellence established at Amistad Academy, we have re-evaluated our model and enhanced it by introducing this supplementary program. The tutoring program is aimed at helping the lowest performing students master fundamental math and reading skills so they have the knowledge and confidence to pass rigorous state exams and excel in AF's college

preparatory curriculum. Throughout a semester or year, tutors teach and mentor the same two students every Saturday during focused four hour sessions. Achievement First manages a professional, standards based, and supportive program to guarantee tutors succeed and students achieve.

## **II. Population Served by Featured Program (One Page)**

### **a. Does the featured program serve all who ask to be served?**

Our academies are designed to support 84 students at each grade level. This size is optimal to ensure that every student at Achievement First is personally known to the teachers and leadership team and will obtain individual services as warranted, but that the schools are large enough to support specialists and supplemental activities. Owing to this constraint, we are unable to serve every applicant. Students are admitted through blind lotteries in kindergarten (elementary academy) and fifth grade (middle academy), with special preference for siblings of current students. We maintain active waiting lists for every grade and admit new students as seats become vacant due to infrequent student departures. In anticipation of the 2007-2008 school year, we received over 3000 applications for approximately 504 open seats after conducting extensive outreach in the communities.

The tutoring program in particular will target the lowest performing 15%-20% of students at all Achievement First middle schools in New York and Connecticut, as well at the Amistad Academy High School in New Haven, CT.

### **b. Please specify what proportion of the population served is:**

#### **i. Learning disabled or special-needs students**

Our schools are committed to serving all students, and no applicants are excluded from the admissions lottery based on disability. In 2006-2007, approximately 6-8% of students in our New York academies qualified for Special Education status.

#### **ii. English language learners**

As with Special Education students, Achievement First is committed to serving all English language learners accepted through our lottery process. However, in 2006-2007, none of our New York students qualified for ELL status.

#### **iii. At or above grade level in reading**

Our students typically arrive testing 2-3 grade levels below the state standards but make great strides in reading performance at Achievement First. For example, when they first arrived at Achievement First Crown Heights Charter School in fall 2006, only 16% of the kindergarten cohort was reading at or above grade level, as measured by the nationally-normed Developmental Reading Assessment. By the end of kindergarten, 86% of the same students were reading at or above grade level. Their progress will continue throughout their tenure at AF Crown Heights Elementary. These breakthrough results are typical across the Achievement First network and exemplify our expectations.

At the middle school level, during their first year with Achievement First, 50% of AF Crown Heights fifth grade students achieved grade level or advanced proficiency on the NYS English Language Arts exam. This result, already beyond the host district average, serves as a near-baseline measure as we look forward to their continued advancement next year and striking progress beyond the New York City and New York State averages. The sixth grade cohort at AF Crown Heights reached 68% proficiency by the end of their second year at the school in 2007.

#### **iv. At or above grade level in mathematics**

At the end of kindergarten, after one year at Achievement First, 75% of kindergarten students at AF Crown Heights were rated at or above grade level in math according to the Terra Nova exam, a nationally-normed mathematics exam administered to students in grades K-2.

On the NYS Math exam, after one year at Achievement First, 71% of AF Crown Heights fifth grade scholars achieved grade level or advanced proficiency, compared to only 60% of students in the host district. Again, these results are exemplary of our successes across the Achievement First network but indicative of the significant work required (including the tutoring program) to bring all students to grade level or beyond.

### III. Program Activities and Budget for Featured Program (Two Pages)

#### a. Please describe the featured program.

The Achievement First school model supports success at every level and institutes extraordinarily high behavior and academic standards to match. The pillars of the Achievement First program include:

- **More Time on Task** – The school day runs from 7:30 am – 4:00 p.m. on Monday-Thursday with tutoring and enrichment activities available after school from 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm and on Saturdays, as well as an average of 1-2 hours of homework per night. Students are dismissed at 1:45 pm on Fridays to allow time for weekly teacher planning and development.
- **Character Education** – All students and faculty live by the REACH values – Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, and Hard Work.
- **College Focus** – All students are continuously exposed to college. Graduates have the academic tools and strong character necessary to enter and succeed in college. In the achievement-oriented culture, it is cool to do well in school.
- **Rigorous, Standards-Based Curriculum** – Students are required to demonstrate mastery of core skills and knowledge drawn directly from New York State Learning Standards. All students are given the high expectations and strong support systems they need to learn.
- **Powerful Use of Ongoing Assessments** – Continuous evaluation of student academic performance will include special internal interim assessments every six weeks. The results of these assessments will be used to inform instruction and target students for additional support.
- **Excellent Teaching** – We recruit a talented faculty from across the country to ensure that our students are taught by knowledgeable, caring, and dedicated professionals. Teachers will continue building their skills during our 13 professional development days and weekly 2-hour Friday professional development sessions. Our teachers will benefit from two AF-wide professional development seminars each year.
- **Parents as Partners** – The school forms a three-way partnership – students, teachers, parents – that works as a team to achieve academic breakthroughs and ensure that no student falls through the cracks.

The tutoring program is being introduced because evaluation of current assessment results indicates that additional time on task and high quality instruction will be required to fulfill our mission and promise to our students. The program complements classroom instruction and ensures that all students have equal opportunity to learn and achieve. In most school environments, time is held constant; that is, each student receives the same “inputs” of instruction. At Achievement First, we hold achievement constant; meaning that amount of time for instruction and the student-teacher ratios for instruction must be variables for struggling students to achieve at levels commensurate with their peers. The tutoring program delivers more instruction in a high-quality, low student-teacher ratio format, ensuring that AF can deliver on its promise that all students will learn.

The specific program objectives are to: supplement and broaden Achievement First’s unwavering dedication to student achievement; provide a second instructional opportunity for those students who need the time and intensity to build math and reading skill, as well as confidence, to pass state proficiency exams; and to recruit, train, and retain the very best tutors so Achievement First students achieve.

The program will be managed at each school site by a Tutor Coordinator. Tutor coordinators are the Saturday Principal of the tutoring program. The tutoring program will feel exactly like school, with the same culture, structure, discipline, and mission. Consistency in student expectations is essential to the rigor, focus, and quality of the tutoring. Tutor coordinators set that standard through active management of students and tutors. It is essential that tutor coordinators provide instructional, administrative, and classroom management support so that tutors are successful in helping their students achieve. The tutor coordinator position is an ideal opportunity for teachers who are aspiring deans or principals because they will gain practical and applicable management and administration experience. Leveraging the power of the Achievement First network, tutor coordinators will be able to compare results across our schools and implement the most effective strategies as determined by assessment results and teacher observations. A program coordinator will be hired through Achievement First to manage this exchange and overall program coordination.

Tutors will be recruited through local universities, colleges, private schools, and local community service organizations. Candidates will be screened, interviewed, tested, and trained by Achievement First to ensure that students have access to high quality, enthusiastic and dedicated tutors. We anticipate hiring approximately 125 tutors across the New York and Connecticut geographies for 2007-2008.

The lowest performing students in each grade will be selected by principals, deans, and teachers to participate in the program. A combination of Interim Assessment scores, grades, state test results, and teacher information will guide the selection process. Students will be in tutoring for at least a trimester at a time, and most students will participate in tutoring for an entire year. Many students will be in tutoring for all four years of their AF careers. Students, parents, and schools will sign a contract before being accepted into the tutoring program.

The weekly Saturday schedule will include 1.5 hours of Math instruction, 1.5 hours of Reading Comprehension, and 45 minutes of personal relationship building and mentor support. Tutors will arrive half an hour early to set up and conclude their day with half an hour of written reflection, assessment discussion with the on-site Tutoring Coordinator, and producing student progress reports.

All tutors will use the same tools in their weekly lesson planning and review to ensure consistent performance and accomplish the aforementioned student achievement goals. These tools include: Math Mastery Log, Math Mastery Daily Plan, Literature Lunch Reciprocal Reading Report, Literature Lunch Daily Plan, Progress Binder, Student Evaluation of Tutoring Session, Tutor Evaluation of Student Performance, and Tutor Journal. The tutoring schedule is set up to provide one hour of tutor preparation and reflection time per Saturday session, in addition to advance preparation work during the week to make full use of these materials.

#### **b. Program Budget**

Please note, the budget for this program is currently in final draft form and may be amended slightly pending final costs and approval by the Board of Trustees.

Achievement First will support tutoring program costs related to the program coordinator salary, promotional and PR materials, initial tutor training, administrative costs, transportation, and

Department of Education compliance costs. The total cost is projected at \$40,260.00. It is these expenses for which support is requested, and a detailed draft budget follows below.

The individual academies will be additionally responsible for program costs related to tutor coordinator and tutor salaries, program materials, and physical and administrative materials. This cost will average approximately \$43,473 per academy and program budgets are available upon request.

Item	Description	Quantity	# of weeks	# of hours/wk	Unit Cost	Total
Program Coordinator Salary	Yearly salary for NY	1			\$ 25,000.00	\$ 25,000.00
Promotional/PR Materials	Brochures and flyers	3500			\$ 0.32	\$ 1,120.00
Training	Permits, manuals, binders, lunch, and materials	2			\$ 2,250.00	\$ 4,500.00
Administrative Costs	Miscellaneous office supplies	1			\$ 300.00	\$ 300.00
Transportation	Visits to sites and partner organizations	1	54		\$ 10.00	\$ 540.00
DOE Compliance Costs	Fingerprinting and background check on tutors	80			\$ 110.00	\$ 8,800.00

**\$**  
**TOTAL: 40,260.00**

#### **IV. Evaluation for Featured Program (One Page plus Attachments)**

##### **a. Process for evaluating the effects of the featured program on students' abilities to succeed academically**

In addition to weekly successes evident in individual students' mastery logs and progress binders, the long-term success of the tutoring program will be marked by several measurable results. Tutoring lesson plans will be closely aligned to New York State learning standards, ensuring that successes of the tutoring intervention will be evident on state exam results and also on results of the interim assessments administered by the school every six weeks to mark student progress on the standards. We are in the process of launching a new student information database which is able to track and chart interim assessment results on individual, class, grade, and school-wide levels for each state standard. This valuable tool will allow ongoing evaluation of the tutoring program, to determine if each standard of focus is mastered by each student on the next interim assessment cycle.

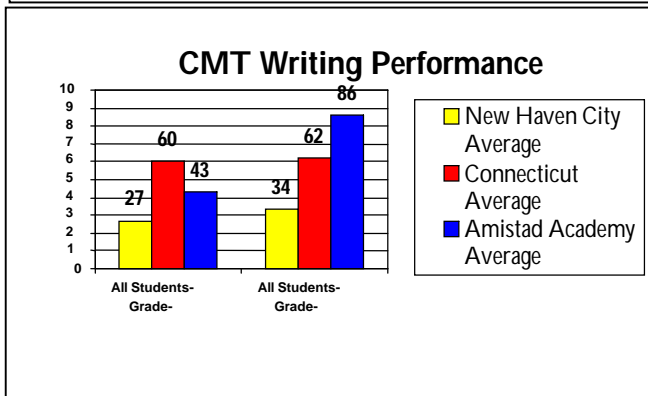
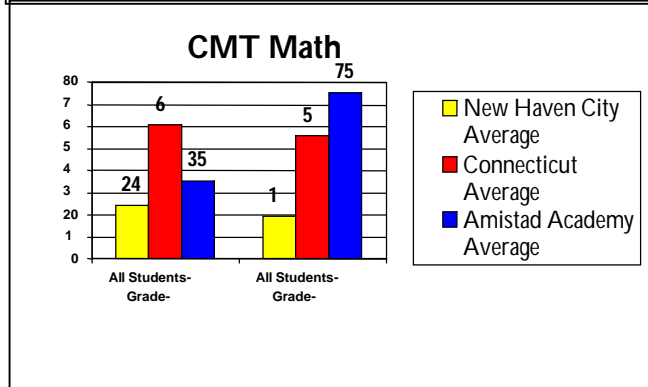
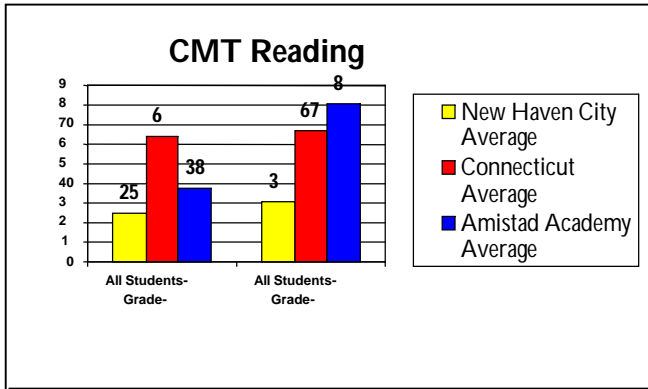
Student achievement is the most fundamental and critical outcome of our work and as a result, the assessment results will be carefully monitored and analyzed to evaluate the ongoing success of the tutoring program and introduce additional "battle plan" measures as needed to ensure student success.

As per our charter contracts with the State Department of Education, each Achievement First school has set extraordinarily high annual benchmarks. It is important to note that our goals are reflective of our goal to close the achievement gap and are likely unattainable in the short term. However, we think it is critical to maintain this vision and pursue our goal by providing a high quality curriculum and offering additional support to students to correct deficiencies.

##### **b. Attached reports**

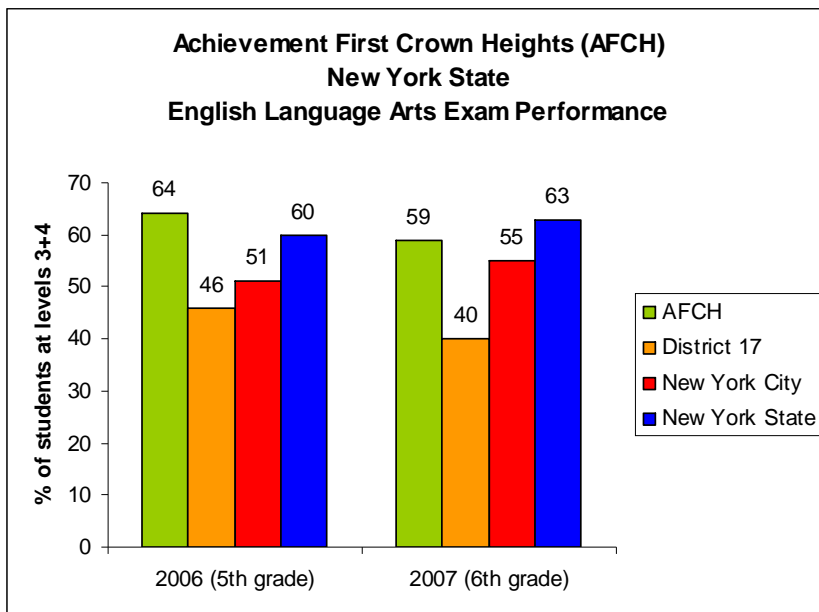
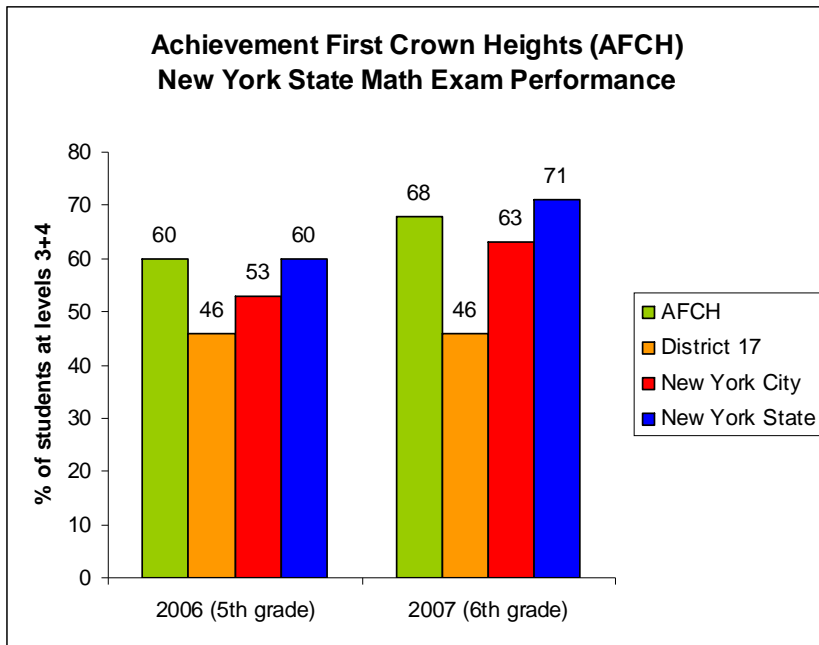
The impact of an Achievement First education is strikingly evident at our flagship school, Amistad Academy, in New Haven, Connecticut. The graphs below show the growth of a single cohort of students, the class of 2004, from 6th to 8th grade in reading, math and writing performance on the Connecticut Mastery Tests, equivalent to the New York State examinations. These students entered Amistad in the fall of 5th grade on par with their New Haven peers – and well below the state. After one year at Amistad, they took the Connecticut Mastery Test in the fall of 6th grade. These results are reported in the left columns. While the Amistad students had begun to break away from their New Haven peers, they still lagged well behind the state average. Two years later, however, these same students had made dramatic gains and far exceeded state averages in all subject areas. These eighth grade scores are reported in the right-hand columns.





Below are results on the New York State examinations for the cohort of students currently entering seventh grade at Achievement First Crown Heights, our oldest scholars in this geography. Over the course of their two years at Achievement First, these students increased from 60% to 68% proficiency on the Math exam. On the English Language Arts exam, reports indicate that proficiency decreased slightly from 64% to 59%; however the gulf continued to widen between our scholars and their peers in the host district.

As indicated earlier, although these results already set our students ahead of their peers, we will not be satisfied until all students achieve proficiency on the NYS standards, and we have designed the tutoring program specifically to address this lag. We believe that the tutoring program is one of the final pushes necessary to achieve the breakthrough academic performance results that will propel our students well beyond the state averages and prepare them for success in top tier colleges and beyond, and look forward to reporting even stronger scores in 2008 as a result of our intensive intervention with struggling scholars.



Also attached please find the “Dashboards of Indicators” for each of our New York academies through June 20, 2007. These reports showcase student demographic information, attendance and homework completion data, and other useful comparative information that demonstrates the need and dedication of our service population.

**Optional: Other Support for Featured Activities**

Attached please find a copy of the cover story from the November 26, 2006 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*. This article, which features Achievement First along with the KIPP and Uncommon Schools networks of high-performing urban charter schools, demonstrates the growing support for and belief in the life-changing work in which we are privileged to participate. Additional press coverage and other information are available upon request.