



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

*Application to establish the
Achievement First North Crown Heights Charter School*

January 4, 2008

Executive Summary

The Achievement First North Crown Heights Charter School (the “School”) proposes to open in Brooklyn in September of 2009 with 168 Kindergarten and 1st grade students, growing to serve 567 students in Kindergarten through sixth grade during the term of its charter. The mission of the proposed charter school is to provide students with the academic and character skills they need to gain admission to top colleges, to succeed in a competitive world, and to serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities. Ultimately (after renewal of the proposed charter), the founders envision a Kindergarten through twelfth grade school that would serve 930 students. The School would be operated by Achievement First, Inc., a not-for-profit charter management organization.

The Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) recommends that the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (“State University Trustees”) approve the charter application for the Achievement First North Crown Heights Charter School.

Background and Description

An application to establish the Achievement First North Crown Heights Charter School in Brooklyn was submitted to the Charter Schools Institute on June 29, 2007. The Institute conducted a rigorous review, including an extensive staff review as well as review by a panel of nationally renowned experts in the charter school arena. Pursuant to its review protocols, the Institute has met with the lead applicants and founding board members and has required the applicants to revise, clarify and otherwise amend the application in numerous respects. In addition, initially Co-Chair Cox of the State University Trustees’ Committee on Charter Schools had an opportunity to question the lead applicant and founding board members. As the result of that meeting, the applicant was directed to strengthen the board of the proposed charter school. The board of Achievement First North Crown Heights reflects a change in composition including a new chairperson and treasurer. In addition, a new lead applicant has been identified. Subsequent to these changes, the members of the State University Trustees’ Committee on Charter Schools had a second opportunity to question the new lead applicant and reconfigured founding board of trustees for the proposed charter school.

The School would open with 168 Kindergarten and 1st grade students, beginning the middle school component in the fourth charter year with the addition of fifth grade. The school would grow to include 567 students in Kindergarten through 6th grades. 2008-09 would be used as a planning year. The founding team envisions a school focused on strengthening the academic and character skills needed for all students to ultimately excel in top tier colleges, to achieve success in a competitive world, and to serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities. Eventually the School’s founders hope to grow the School through the twelfth grade.

To achieve its mission, the design of the educational program of the School is based on the Achievement First school model, a model first developed and tested at the Amistad Academy, which has shown success in significantly increasing the achievement of students at-risk of academic failure in Connecticut. This model has been successfully replicated at Elm City College Preparatory Elementary and Middle Schools in New Haven, Connecticut, and is now

being implemented at Achievement First Crown Heights Charter School, Achievement First East New York Charter School and Achievement First Endeavor Charter School (all in Brooklyn and authorized by the New York City Schools Chancellor), as well as Achievement First-Bushwick (in Brooklyn and authorized by the Board of Trustees in January 2006 and opened in the fall of 2006). Primary design elements include: 1) Unwavering focus on student achievement; 2) Consistent, proven, standards-based curriculum; 3) Interim assessments and strategic use of performance data; 4) More time on task; 5) Principals with the power to lead; 6) Increased supervision of the quality of instruction; 7) Aggressive recruitment of talent; 8) Disciplined, achievement-oriented school culture; 9) Rigorous, high-quality focused training for principals and leaders; and 10) Parents and community as partners. The model also breaks the School up into “Academies” of, eventually, Kindergarten through fourth grades, fifth through eighth grades, and ninth through twelfth grades.

The original school on which the Achievement First model is based, the Amistad Academy, has consistently shown great success in closing the achievement gap in New Haven. On Connecticut’s Mastery Test in 2002 through 2006, Amistad students (who are 98% students of color and 80% eligible for free/reduced lunch) outperformed the state averages in reading and mathematics, and also outperformed suburban school districts. Two Achievement First charter schools have administered assessments under the New York State Testing Program (NYSTP). Achievement First Crown Heights Charter School, which was in its second year in 2006-07, outperformed its local school district. The percentage of students scoring at the proficient level on NYSTP’s English language arts and mathematics assessments was notably greater than that of the district. Because Achievement First Endeavor administered the state assessments for the first time in 2006-07, shortly after students were first enrolled in the school, a comparison to its local district is not valid.

The School has developed its curriculum based on New York State standards, using Saxon Math, Direct Instruction for reading, Core Knowledge for history, FOSS Science, SRA Decoding, Waterford computer-based Early Literacy, and Achievement First’s REACH program. In the middle school, the curriculum will be based on that used at Amistad Academy.

The School intends to enter into a management agreement with Achievement First, Inc. that would become effective upon the approval of the School’s charter. Achievement First, Inc. is the non-profit entity formed by the leaders of Amistad Academy to provide schools with access to the fundamental characteristics of the Amistad Academy model and its elementary school counterpart, first modeled in New Haven at the Elm City schools. Achievement First, Inc. will provide, on a fee-for-service basis, a menu of support services such as start-up, principal training and evaluation, staff recruitment, curriculum, staff development, budget, fundraising, information technology, school evaluation and marketing/advocacy. The school would compensate Achievement First with 10% of its basic per pupil revenues for the first five years of operation. (As with all management contracts, the Institute will review the final proposed contract pursuant to the charter and on behalf of the Board of Trustees). As set forth above, Achievement First, Inc. currently manages four schools in New York.

The applicant and proposed trustees have chosen a managerial structure whereby the School’s principal will serve as the school leader and be dually accountable to both the School’s board of

trustees and Achievement First, Inc. (The elementary school program and the middle school program will have separate principals.) The School principal for each program will implement the mission and the policies set by the School's board of trustees, hire and supervise all school-based staff, and observe, evaluate, and provide professional development to teachers as the instructional leader of the School. Achievement First, Inc., for its part, will supervise the School principals, providing both coaching as well as supervision and evaluation. It will provide its evaluations to the School's board of trustees, together with the raw data supporting its evaluation to allow the School's board to make its own independent evaluation. The board of trustees of the School will have final hiring and firing decisions of the principals; if Achievement First, Inc. disagrees with the School board's decision in this respect, it can choose to terminate its contract with the School. The School can terminate its contract with Achievement First, Inc. for cause, as well as choose not to renew the contract upon its expiration at the end of the charter term.

The applicant has found individuals to serve on the proposed board of trustees whose backgrounds and expertise reflect a variety of talents and skills. Based on conversations with the proposed trustees, they appear to clearly understand the roles and responsibilities of a board of trustees and have the ability to ensure the appropriate and effective operation of the proposed charter school, including providing appropriate oversight not only over the School's principal and leadership team, but of Achievement First, Inc. as well. The School's by-laws and code of ethics make clear that trustees associated with Achievement First, Inc. will recuse themselves from voting on all issues involving Achievement First, Inc. In addition, the non-affiliated trustees have made clear their ability to oversee Achievement First, Inc., including negotiating the services contract with Achievement First, Inc. and overseeing its implementation. The proposed initial members of the board of trustees are set forth below.

1. Wanda Felton (Chair) - Managing Director of Helix Associates, a division of Jeffries & Company. Has worked in investment banking and private equity fundraising for more than 20 years. Previously worked as a Director in the Private Fund Group of Credit Suisse Boston and a Managing Director for Hamilton Lane Advisors.
2. Hasoni Pratts (Treasurer) - Chief of Staff for New York State Assemblyman Karim Camara/43rd District. Previously worked as an Application Specialist for the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services and as a Consultant/Financial Analyst for Rivers & Associates.
3. Matthew Klein – Executive Director of Blue Ridge Foundation New York. Formerly worked in non-profit management and civil rights law. Helped co-found Leadership, Education, and Athletics in Partnership (LEAP); and sits on the steering committee of the New York City Youth Funders Network.
4. Denise Gordon – US Human Resources Director for Hill & Knowlton. Formerly a Senior Manager of Human Resources at Deloitte & Touche, LLP; and the Human Resource team at Pfizer, Inc.
5. Mashea Ashton – Executive Director for the New York Program and Senior Advisor for Charter School Policy. Formerly Executive Director for Charter Schools for the NYC

Department of Education; Midwest Director of Business Development for the development of KIPP Schools; a special education teacher; and serves on the board of the National Alliance for Charter Schools; and is a founding board member for the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

6. Lesley Esters Redwine– Director of External Relations NY for Achievement First. Formerly President/CEO of the New York Chapter of the Black Alliance for Educational Options; Project Director for Agenda for Children Tomorrow’s Bridgebuilders; and Policy Analyst at The After School Corporation.
7. One seat reserved for a parent of a student enrolled in the school.

The founding team of the School is currently working with the New York City Department of Education’s (“NYCDOE”) Office of New Schools to secure space in Region 8. The Office of New Schools has provided a letter acknowledging its awareness and intent to locate space for the Achievement First North Crown Heights Charter School. However the New York City Department of Education has not completed its facility and accountability analysis of district schools. The New York City Department of Education will communicate with the Institute regarding facilities’ decisions. In the event that space is not available through the New York City Department of Education, the founding team will pursue all avenues to locate and identify a facility, including the many relationships they have established with New York’s philanthropic community, as well as through working with public officials and community agencies. In the long term, the school intends to occupy its own permanent space, and has developed its financial plan that reflects this intention.

The fiscal impact of the School on its district of residence, the New York City School District, will be negligible and is summarized below.

Number of Students	Per Pupil Aid	Total Dollars to Charter School from NYCDOE
168(Year 2 – 2009-10)	\$11,023	\$1,851,864
.567 (Year 5 – 2012-13)	\$11,023	\$6,250,041

Using the figures above for total funds to be transferred from the New York City School District to the proposed charter school, the year one figure of \$1,851,864 represents 0.011% of an estimated budget of \$16.5 billion for the New York City Schools. In year five, the figure above represents 0.04% of the estimated budget. The cumulative fiscal impact of all charter schools on the New York City School District was estimated to be 0.51% in 2005-06 according to the State Education Department. The calculations conservatively assume that there will be no increase in the per pupil aid or the overall budget of the New York City School District over the life of the proposed charter. The Institute’s calculations do not account for special education, federal Title I funds or other grants or funds provided by the district and to be received by the School. The applicant made an assessment that the fiscal impact of the proposed school on nonpublic schools in the same geographic area would be negligible.

The Institute has notified the New York City Department of Education as well as public and private schools in the geographic area of the proposed school and has received no comment from these entities. (Copies of the notification letters are on file in the Albany office of the Institute.)

The application used a multi-faceted approach to demonstrate that the proposed charter school is likely to have sufficient enrollment to meet its student enrollment target. First the application included letters of support from legislators (Congresswoman Yvett D. Clark and New York State Assemblyman Karim Camara), and community based organizations (Community Board #8, Brooklyn Children’s Museum, Brooklyn Arts Council) and “partner” organizations (Brooklyn College School of Education, Dr. John Flateau-a professor at Medgar Evers College, Robin Hood Foundation, and the Independence Community Foundation). Secondly, the applicant provided information regarding the waiting lists of three currently open Achievement First charter schools that will enroll Kindergarten and first grades in the 2009 year. The schools are located in Crown Heights, East New York and Bushwick, and their waiting lists reflect 678 Kindergarten students and 578 first grade students for a total of 1,256 students. Finally, the applicant also provided petitions that included the signatures of 31 parents of students who will be eligible to enroll in Kindergarten or first grade in the fall of 2009.

Findings

Based on the comprehensive review of the application, discussion with national experts and interviews of the applicant and the proposed board of trustees, the Institute makes the following findings.

1. The charter school described in the application meets the requirements of Article 56 of the Education Law (as amended) and all other applicable laws, rules, and regulations as reflected in (among other things):
 - the inclusion of appropriate policies and procedures for the provision of services and programs for students with disabilities and English language learners;
 - the required policies for addressing the issues related to student discipline, complaints, personnel matters, health services, Freedom of Information Law (FOIL), and the Open Meetings Law;
 - the inclusion of the proposed by-laws for the operation of the school’s board of trustees; and
 - the inclusion of an analysis of the projected fiscal and programmatic impact on surrounding public and private schools.
2. The applicants have demonstrated the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound matter as reflected in (among other things):
 - the provision of an educational program that meets or exceeds the State performance standards;

- the replication of a model that has had outstanding and demonstrable success in raising student achievement, including closing the achievement gap;
 - the articulation of a culture of self-evaluation and accountability at both the administrative and board level;
 - the student achievement goals articulated by the applicant;
 - an appropriate roster of educational personnel;
 - a sound mission statement;
 - a comprehensive assessment plan;
 - the provision of sound start-up, first-year, and five-year budget plans;
 - a plan to acquire comprehensive general liability insurance to include any vehicles, employees, and property;
 - evidence of adequate community support for, and interest in, the charter school sufficient to allow the school to reach its anticipated enrollment; and
 - the inclusion of descriptions for programmatic and independent fiscal audits, with fiscal audits occurring at least, annually.
3. Granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Charter Schools Act (as amended). This finding is reflected by (among other things):
- the inclusion of a curriculum document that specifies how the proposed curriculum will ensure that students will meet or exceed the performance standards of the Board of Regents;
 - a comprehensive plan to assess student achievement through the use of State tests, externally-verifiable standardized tests and other diagnostic assessments;
 - the articulation of strategies to amend and differentiate instruction where assessment data indicates such need;
 - the staffing of classes with high-quality teachers to allow for more concentrated, focused and differentiated instruction;
 - the inclusion of significant opportunities for professional development of the school's instructional staff throughout the year;

- “sacred” three hours blocks of time dedicated to literacy;
- the inclusion of tutoring during and after school, as well as on Saturdays, for students at-risk of academic failure;
- an organizational structure that supports the principal in functioning as a true instructional leader;
- coaching provided to classroom teachers by the school principal and academic dean; and
- a commitment to providing an educational program focused on outcomes, not inputs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on its review and findings, the Charter Schools Institute recommends that the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approve the application for the Achievement First North Crown Heights Charter School to open in the North Crown Heights community of Brooklyn in September of 2009.

Achievement First North Crown Heights Charter School

Brooklyn, New York

Basic Identification Information

Lead Applicant(s): Lesley Esters Redwine
 Management Co: Achievement First, Inc.
 Other Partners: None
 Location (District): Brooklyn (North Crown Heights community)/NYC DOE Region 8, Administrative District 16
 Student Pop./Grades: 168 K and 1st grade students; expanding to 567 students grades K – 6
 Opening Date: September 2009

School District of Proposed Location Profile

Public School Enrollment (2005-2006):	13,396	
Percentages (2005-2006)	White: 1% Black: 86% Hispanic: 11% Asian, Other: 2%	
Percentage of Public School Student Participating in Federal Lunch Program (2005-2006):	<u>70%</u>	
Test Scores (ELA/2007 and Math/2007) -- Percentages of Public School Students Failing to Meet the Regents Performance Standards:	<u>ELA</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>
	3 rd – 47.9	72.1
	4 th – 42.9	58.9
	5 th – 42.6	58.3
	6 th – 29.3	42.1
	7 th – 27.9	35.2
	8 th – 26.6	30.3
	Avg. 36.2	49.5

Source: demographic data is from the New York State Accountability and Overview Report 2005 – 06; test data are from the 2006-07 results released on the State Education Department website.