



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

External Evaluation Report of Achievement First Bushwick Charter School

2007 – 2008

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Achievement First Bushwick Charter School External Evaluation Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The external inspection is part of a comprehensive oversight and evaluation system for those charter schools authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York ("State University Trustees"). The external inspection during the second or third year of a school's initial five-year charter cycle and periodically thereafter provides an independent assessment of the school's progress toward meeting the academic and, on a more limited basis, organizational Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (QEBs), a component of the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks ("State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks").¹

The external inspection complements the regular reviews conducted by the Charter Schools Institute (the "Institute") by incorporating the Institute's documentation of the school's previous record of performance. This report provides an analysis of the data reviewed before and during the inspection visit and reflects any trends evident therein. In addition, this assessment provides insights which may contribute to the school's ongoing improvement efforts and support the school's case when it applies for initial or subsequent charter renewal. Finally, the Institute uses external inspection reports in discussions with school boards about the quality of their schools' educational programs and the schools' prospects for charter renewal.

This report is organized in the following sections:

- I. Introduction**
- II. Conduct of the Visit**
- III. School Description**
- IV. Executive Summary**
- V. School Progress Report**
- VI. Overall Trends Regarding the School**

Section I - the "Introduction" provides an overview of the external inspection process, as well as an overview of the organization of this report. Section II - the "Conduct of the Visit" includes a list of the members of the site visit team and their biographical sketches, along with a synopsis of the documents reviewed in preparation for the visit. Section III - the "School Description," as the title indicates, briefly describes the charter school in terms of its establishment and history. Section IV - the "Executive Summary" provides a summary of the major conclusions reflected in the report.

Section V - entitled the "School Progress Report," is divided into two parts: Part I, the "Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Academic Success" and Part II, the "Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Organizational Viability." Both parts of the School Progress Report reflect evidence and analysis of the school's effectiveness in meeting the standards set out in selected QEBs of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks.

¹ A full description of the State University Trustees' Renewal Benchmarks and *Practices, Policies, and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools* authorized by the State University Board of Trustees can be found at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org>.

The “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Academic Success” is further divided into two components: the “School Performance Review,” which provides an analysis of student academic performance for the most recent two or three years as an indication of the school’s academic success (Renewal Benchmark 1A), and the “School Educational Program Review,” which reflects the visit team’s analysis of the qualitative aspects of the school’s educational program based upon the guiding questions provided by the Institute and aligned with Renewal Benchmarks 1B - 1F.

“Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Organizational Viability,” focuses on three components: clarity of the school’s mission and vision to its stakeholders; parent and student satisfaction; and the establishment of systems to monitor the effectiveness of the school’s instructional program. Renewal Benchmarks 2B, 2D.1, and 2C.1 provide the underpinnings for this part of the report.

In the final section of the External Visit report, Section VI - “Overall Trends Regarding the School,” the visit team offers its insights about any patterns that have emerged across the full spectrum of the school. Here the team offers its judgments about the school’s effectiveness at meeting the broad goals defined in the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 as amended (Education Law §2850(2) (a-f)):

- improving student learning and achievement;
- increasing learning opportunities for all students (particularly students at risk of academic failure);
- encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- creating new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- expanding parental choice in public schools; and
- moving from a rule-based to performance-based accountability system by holding schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

The judgments of the team are organized into two categories: academic program and organizational viability. The framework for the progress report discussion is shown in Appendix A. For your reference, the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks, in their entirety, may be found on the Institute’s website at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm>.

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The inspection of the Achievement First Bushwick Charter School was conducted on May 8 and 9, 2008, by an independent team of experienced educators from Class Measures of Stoneham, Massachusetts. Class Measures was assisted by Clarus Group of Hanover, Massachusetts. The Class Measures team included:

- **Peter Davies** is a former British School Inspector who has worked in school and district accountability for more than ten years in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Middle East. He was formerly an administrator with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris and a visiting professor to the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies. He currently trains Examiners for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and monitors their work. He holds a Master of Arts degree from Cambridge University and an advanced graduate degree in educational administration from London University.
- **Melanie Gallo**, *Lead Inspector*, has been an educator for 35 years. A member of the National School Reform faculty, she has been a teacher and a school director. She has been a founder of two schools: a school in New Hampshire and a charter school in Massachusetts. She has been recognized by the College Board for excellence in teaching AP English and is the author of *Senior Project in Creating the Good High School* by Mackin/Silva. She is a trained Critical Friends coach and has served on the Board of the Massachusetts Drama Guild. She is currently on the graduate school adjunct faculty at Fitchburg State College. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and a Master's degree in Education from Fitchburg State College. She is at present a Leadership Consultant for Class Measures.
- **Thomas Petray**, *Report Writer*, has over 33 years of experience working as a teacher, administrator, or consultant in public and private schools, at the university level, and at the state level. Recently, he worked as a District Examiner for The Office of Educational Quality & Accountability in Massachusetts. He has 12 years of experience teaching students of grades 2-6 in several public and private schools in San Antonio, Texas. In addition, Tom has administrative experience serving over the course of 20 years variously in university or public schools in elementary and central office leadership positions. As principal of a large K-5, urban, bilingual/ESL cluster school for 7 years in San Antonio, he led the faculty in significantly closing achievement gaps across all sub-populations. He implemented school-wide initiatives in reading and math in Texas and in school environment in Massachusetts with broad K-5 faculty support. Tom received his B.A. in Education and his M. Ed. in Educational Administration from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio.
- **Dorothy Presser** has served as a school committee member and officer for 10 years. She is currently Chair of Division I of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees and is a member of the board of directors of the organization. Dorothy took a lead role in the development of her district's first strategic plan and in aligning district activities to the plan. Dorothy is also a leadership consultant for Class Measures, assisting an urban school district in the strategic planning process. She has a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of New Hampshire and has completed the Institute for Educational Leadership's Education Policy Fellowship Program at Northeastern University.

- **Jeanne Simons** is a leadership consultant with a specialization in mathematics. She worked previously as a high school mathematics teacher and in mathematics reform in urban school districts as a Targeted Mathematics Specialist with the Massachusetts Department of Education. She has experience in the development of coaching programs, effective differentiation, assessment and the formative usage of data, and in developing and providing professional development for teachers and leaders across a variety of reform topics. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from the California Institute of Technology and a Masters of Education in Mind, Brain and Education from Harvard.

Clarus Group provided inspection planning, quality assurance, and report review, writing, and editing services. The Clarus Group team included:

- **F. Daniel Ahern, Jr.** is the President of Clarus Group, a consulting firm dedicated to helping governments and nonprofit organizations meet high standards of performance and integrity. Together with Class Measures, Clarus Group has conducted numerous charter school renewal inspections in Massachusetts and New York, and has evaluated the New Hampshire charter school program. Clarus Group has also revised the Massachusetts charter school inspection protocol, application, and report template. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, Dan served for 10 years as the First Assistant Inspector General for Management in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General. He has also been a performance auditor for the Virginia General Assembly and an independent consultant to state agencies in Massachusetts and Virginia. He has taught graduate courses in nonprofit management and public administration at Northeastern University and Clark University. He holds a Master of Public Administration degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Northeastern University.
- **Pamela Bloomfield** is the Vice President of Clarus Group. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, she served for 10 years as the Deputy Inspector General for Management in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General, where she led several major reviews of Massachusetts charter schools. She has also been the Assistant Director of Finance and Administration for an Oregon county; a management consultant assisting federal, state, and local government agencies; and a course assistant teaching written and oral communications at the Harvard Business School. She currently serves on the Board of Editors of *Public Administration Review* and on the Board of Directors of a local nonprofit organization. She holds a Master of Public Administration degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Smith College.

As noted above, the Second-Year External Inspection team used the QEBs, a subset of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks, as the guides for its evaluation. In addition, the team relied on a set of framework questions to structure the “School Progress Report” section of this document. Prior to the two-day visit, the team reviewed the school’s documents, including its annual *Accountability Plan Progress Report*, reports from previous site visits by the Charter Schools Institute or other entities, such as the New York State Education Department, and relevant sections of the school’s charter agreement. During the visit, the Second-Year External Inspection team observed classes, reviewed student work, interviewed school administrators, school board members, staff, parents and students, and reviewed curriculum and other documents to understand the efforts the school is making to achieve its academic and organizational goals.

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application for Achievement First Bushwick Charter School ("Achievement First Bushwick") on January 24, 2006, and the school's charter became effective by operation of law on June 27, 2006. Achievement First Bushwick opened in the fall of 2006 with an enrollment of 163 students in grades kindergarten and first, and added second and fifth grades in 2007-08 with a total enrollment of 360 students. The school plans to add one elementary and one middle school grade in each subsequent year of its initial charter, projecting an enrollment of 688 students in kindergarten through eighth grade in 2010-11.

The mission statement for Achievement First Bushwick Charter School is as follows:

Achievement First Bushwick Charter School is a public charter school focused on strengthening the academic and character skills needed for all students to excel in top tier colleges, to achieve success in a competitive world, and to serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities.

The school's board of trustees partners with the Achievement First network of schools, a non-profit organization that functions as a charter management organization. According to the school's charter application, Achievement First was created to bring to scale the impressive student achievement results of the nationally-acclaimed Amistad Academy, founded in 1999 in New Haven, Connecticut. The specific services provided by the Achievement First organization include the following: Start-up functions, including recruiting and training staff and facilitating the school's purchase of materials, equipment, and supplies; principal training and evaluation; a continuously refined curriculum, interim assessment system, daily schedule, and an intranet containing curricular and other school resources; staff development, including a two-year sequence of professional development opportunities for teachers; budget services, including a bimonthly budget report to the school's Board of Trustees; fundraising; information technology, including electronic shared folder system for curricular materials, desktop and laptop support, training in the use of a student information system, and installation and maintenance of the internet, shared server, and phone system; school evaluation, including an intensive school evaluation within three years after the effective date; and school advocacy services.

In the charter's Executive Summary, the founders of Achievement First Bushwick state that, "we share a belief that ALL of our students can climb the mountain to college." In using the Achievement First school model, the school cited the following key program elements to be used in meeting its mission:

- an unwavering focus on breakthrough student achievement, including fully closing the achievement gap;
- consistent, proven, standards-based curriculum, including what is taught at every grade level is defined clearly and systematically so that all essential content is mastered over time;
- interim assessments and strategic use of performance data, including standards-based assessments administered every 6 weeks in all the core subjects and individual instructional plans developed in conjunction with school leaders for each teacher based on the assessment results;

- more time on task, including three hours daily for reading instruction in elementary grades and three hours of instruction in reading and writing in the middle school grades;
- principals with the power to lead;
- increased supervision of the quality of instruction, including a School Manager to handle operational issues, a Dean of Students to coordinate discipline, and an Academic Dean in the school's second year, all of which will free the Principal up to focus on instruction;
- aggressive recruitment of teaching talent;
- discipline, achievement-oriented school culture;
- rigorous, high-quality, focused training for principals and leaders, including a "residency" year before implementing the program and a minimum of 3 weeks of high-quality professional development before the school year begins for all teachers; and
- parents and community as partners, including parent "contracts."

School Year (2007-08)

196 Instructional Days²

School Day (2007-08)

7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (Monday thru Thursday)³

7:30 a.m. to 1:50 p.m. (Friday)

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment⁴	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2006-07	162	162	163	K-1	K-1	K-1	YES
2007-08	318	318	360	K-2, 5	K-2, 5	K-2, 5	YES
2008-09	471			K-3, 5-6			
2009-10	620			K-7			
2010-11	688			K-8			

² According to the school's charter, the school year includes a required three-week (15 instructional days) summer academy.

³ According to the school's charter, 7:30 to 7:50 a.m. is used for breakfast, morning work, and tutoring; 3:40 to 4:00 is used for dismissal; 3:45 to 4:50 is used for intensive tutoring; and 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. for Homework Club.

⁴ Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, may represent slightly different enrollment levels depending on the date in which this data was collected.

	2006-2007	
Special Populations	% of Enroll. AF Bushwick	% of Enroll. Community District #32
Students with Disabilities	2.5 %	11.7 %
Limited English Proficient	0.0 %	18.4 %

Source: New York State Education Department Database

	2006-2007	
Free/Reduced Lunch	% of Enroll. AF Bushwick	% of Enroll. Community District #32
Eligible for Free Lunch	50.9 %	79.5 %
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	18.4 %	5.1 %

Source: New York State Department of Education Database

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter – 1st Year	2006-07	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter, End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	NONE
Original Charter – 2 nd Year	2007-08	2 nd	YES	External School Evaluation Report	

IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Achievement First Bushwick systematically gathers assessment data from a variety of external and internal sources throughout the school year. In addition to administering a range of external assessments, the school administers interim assessments, developed by Achievement First, Inc., in English language arts and mathematics; these assessments are criterion-referenced and aligned to the New York State performance standards. Achievement First Bushwick staff analyze assessment data at regularly scheduled meetings to measure improvements in student achievement, to group students for instruction, to determine whether individual student interventions are necessary, and to modify curriculum. The school's curriculum is standards-based and aligned to the New York State performance standards. Teachers reported aligning their lessons to the curriculum and then using the results from the standards-based interim assessments to formatively direct and modify instruction within their classrooms to improve student achievement.

Achievement First Bushwick's elementary grades (currently Kindergarten – 2nd grade) and middle grades (currently the 5th grade) are housed at two separate sites and are each led by a principal. The respective principals are responsible for setting the vision, goals, and priorities for their school sites and for evaluating and supervising the teachers at their sites. Teachers are formally evaluated twice each year using a nine-page evaluation instrument entitled "AF Professional Growth Plan." Teachers are recruited by Achievement First, Inc. Most teachers observed by the inspection team provided effective inquiry-based, differentiated instruction. The school provides a range of services for students requiring additional academic supports.

Achievement First Bushwick's strong school culture promotes a culture of learning. The school has a clear discipline policy that is based on the REACH values of respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship, and hard work. The policy is documented in the school's family handbooks, well understood by school community members, and consistently applied. Students were observed to be well behaved, enthusiastic about their learning, and respectful to each other and their teachers. Teachers, students, and parents regard Achievement First Bushwick as a safe place. The Second-Year External Inspection team found that Achievement First Bushwick's programs support the school's mission and reflect the key design elements of the school's charter. All parents and students interviewed by the inspection team expressed high levels of satisfaction with the school.

Achievement First Bushwick is governed by a board of trustees consisting of nine members, including one representative of Achievement First, Inc.; the latter evaluates the school's two principals. The Second-Year External Inspection team's interview with the board was attended by the board chair and the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations, who is not a board member. Although the board receives periodic oral reports from school staff regarding certain school assessments and achievement-related initiatives, it was not clear from the board meeting minutes reviewed by the inspection team that the board receives regular reports in writing from the school leadership regarding key indicators of the school's academic progress or that the board regularly receives presentations on or discusses assessment results or strategies implemented by the principals to improve student performance. The board chair told the inspection team that the board's current priority is to find a permanent location for the school; however, minutes reviewed by the inspection team contained no substantial discussion of the facilities issue. When asked whether the board has adopted a strategic plan, the board chair and the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations referred the inspection team to the school's charter. The inspection team saw no evidence in the minutes that the board has engaged in strategic planning discussions.

V. SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

Part I: Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Academic Success

A. "School Performance Review"

Performance Summary: In 2006-07 Achievement First Bushwick served students in kindergarten and 1st grades, and had not yet administered any state exams. As a result, none of the required measures in the school's Accountability Plan applied. Student gains on the Developmental Reading Assessment suggest the school is making progress in English language arts, and there was no data with which to evaluate the school's other academic goals.

English language arts: Students demonstrated large gains on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The kindergarten class went from 18 percent proficient at the beginning of the year to 86 percent at year's end, far exceeding the target of 50. Similarly, the 1st grade moved from 13 percent to 86 percent proficient over the course of the year, exceeding its target of 55 percent.

Mathematics: Terra Nova results were not available at the time this report was submitted.

Science: Not applicable this year.

Social Studies: Not applicable this year.

NCLB: The school is deemed to be in Good Standing under the state's NCLB Accountability system.

Additional Goals (optional): Achievement First Bushwick achieved its attendance goal with a combined student attendance rate of 96 percent, exceeding the 95 percent target. The school achieved its student suspension and discipline goal with only one short-term suspension in 2006-07. The response rate for the parent survey was too low to evaluate the satisfaction goal. The school also reported meeting its fiscal soundness goals.

B. "School Educational Program Review"

- **To what extent does the school have a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning?**

Achievement First Bushwick systematically gathers assessment data from a variety of external and internal sources throughout the school year. The school uses the results of these assessments to determine whether the school met the student achievement goals contained in its Accountability Plan. With the offering of 5th grade, the school administered the New York State Testing Program assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and social studies for the first time in the 2007-08 school year. At the time of Second-Year External Inspection visit, the school's 5th grade test results had not been released by the state.

Achievement First Bushwick also administers two standardized, nationally normed reading assessments: the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP). The school administers the DRA to all kindergarten students and to all new 1st and 2nd grade students at the start of the school year, to establish a baseline for reading achievement, and to all

kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade students in the middle of the school year and at the end of the school year, to assess reading growth. According to the elementary principal, teachers convert the DRA scores to guided reading levels to assist in the selection of appropriate reading books for students and use the DRA as both a formative and summative external assessment. The school also administers the DRP to all new 1st, 2nd, and 5th grade students at the start of the school year, to establish a second reading baseline, to 2nd and 5th grade students in the middle of the school year, and to all kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 5th grade students at the end of the school year, to assess reading growth. In the 2007-08 school year, the school administered a reading assessment developed by Fountas and Pinnell to all 5th grade students. According a school letter to parents regarding this assessment, the purpose of the assessment was to assist parents in selecting reading books for their children and to help their children improve their reading skills.

Achievement First Bushwick uses the TerraNova and the Stanford-10 to assess student performance and growth in mathematics. The TerraNova is administered in the elementary grades, and the Stanford-10 is administered in 5th grade. All new 1st and 2nd grade students take the TerraNova Mathematics test, a national, norm-referenced assessment, in the fall of the school year as a baseline for mathematics achievement; all kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade students take the test again at the end of the school year to enable the school to assess their academic growth in mathematics. All 5th grade students take the Stanford-10 mathematics test in the fall and again at the end of the year. In addition, Saxon Math assessments are administered to students in kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade at the end of each unit of Saxon Math instruction.

The Second-Year External Inspection team confirmed, through interviews with the elementary and middle grades principals and reviews of assessment documents, that every six weeks, Achievement First Bushwick teachers administer interim assessments, developed by Achievement First, Inc., in English language arts and mathematics. These interim assessments are criterion-referenced and aligned to the New York State performance standards, according to the school principals and an Achievement First, Inc. document reviewed by the inspection team entitled “Notes on Major Assessments Used at Achievement First.” The assessments provide detailed information regarding students’ academic strengths and weaknesses. Each interim assessment covers standards taught during the previous six weeks. During the 2007-08 school year, according to a school document labeled “Key Testing Dates” reviewed by the inspection team, the school administered interim assessments in writing, reading comprehension, grammar, listening, mathematics, history, and science to 2nd grade students.

Achievement First Bushwick administers an assessment to all 5th grade students at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the school year; according to the middle grades principal and the “Key Testing Dates” document referenced above, this assessment covers all New York State performance standards for 5th grade writing, reading comprehension, grammar, and mathematics. Middle grades teachers also administer interim assessments to 5th grade students in science and social studies at the end of each unit of instruction.

The Second-Year External Inspection team’s interviews with principals and reviews of assessment analyses and the Achievement First, Inc. document entitled “Notes on Major Assessments Used at Achievement First” confirmed that Achievement First Bushwick staff systematically analyze data from the New York State Testing Program assessments, the other external assessments discussed earlier in this section, and interim assessment data to measure improvements in student achievement, to group students for instruction, to determine whether individual student interventions are necessary, and to modify curriculum. Teachers at Achievement First Bushwick input data from the interim assessments into Achievement First’s online platform for interim assessments; the teachers then print

out the results of the spreadsheets that show which standards the students in the teacher's class have and have not mastered. The categories listed in the spreadsheets for students in kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade reviewed by the inspection team included "areas of strength," "red flags," "re-teach," and "differentiation groups."

According to the elementary and middle grades principals, teams of teachers hold "achievement meetings" after the first three weeks of school, and every six weeks thereafter, to review classroom assessment data and determine which students have and have not mastered the standards taught thus far during the school year. Based on these meetings, teachers plan interventions and next steps for instruction. Three weeks after each achievement meeting, according to the principals, each teaching team meets to review student assessment data from the recently administered interim assessments; the days on which these meetings are held are called "data days." According to a data day agenda provided to the inspection team by the elementary principal, the teaching teams meet with "administrative instructional coaches," who consist of the principal, the academic dean, and dean of students, to discuss the assessment data and develop data-driven plans that include remedial interventions, regrouping strategies to re-teach material, and grade-wide unit plans and materials. The alternating cycle of achievement meetings and data days continues throughout the school year.

The First-Year Evaluation Letter noted that Achievement First Bushwick relied on scripted curricular programs and that "it did not appear that there were many opportunities for re-teaching within this model." As discussed above, the Second-Year External Evaluation team found that teaching teams regularly develop re-teaching plans based on the results of the school's interim assessments. The inspection team also found that assessment data are used to modify curriculum. For example, one elementary teacher reported that in the 2007-08 school year, the mathematics assessments administered to elementary students showed that students were not retaining mathematics skills and that teachers identified the "weak spiral" curriculum materials in the Saxon Math program as a factor contributing to student performance problems. Accordingly, the elementary teachers decided to supplement the Saxon Math materials with curriculum materials from Everyday Math and Investigations in Number, Data, and Space in order to strengthen the elementary mathematics curriculum for the 2007-08 school year. In addition, a middle grades teacher told the Second-Year External Inspection team that the school had instituted a reading program called "hour of power" in the 2007-08 school year in response to initial reading assessment data showing that many 5th grade students had poor reading skills.

Middle grades teachers at Achievement First Bushwick use an internal assessment called "exit tickets"; each exit ticket contains three to five questions regarding each day's lesson. According to the middle grades principal, teachers use the exit ticket performance information to re-teach individual students or to modify the next lesson for the whole class if many students had difficulty answering the exit ticket questions regarding the previous day's lesson. Teachers also use the exit ticket performance information to identify students to be assigned to after-school or Saturday tutoring, according to the middle grades principal.

According to a document regarding grading scales that Achievement First Bushwick provided to the Second-Year External Inspection team, kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade teachers grade student work in reading on the basis of DRA scores and guided reading levels; they grade student writing on the basis of the interim writing assessments. Kindergarten and 1st grade teachers grade student work in mathematics on the basis of the Saxon Math assessments and the interim assessments. The grading scale document showed cut-off scores for advanced, proficient, below proficient, and substantially deficient, with the higher cut-off scores for each subsequent trimester. The middle grades principal told the inspection team that because teachers use and discuss common interim

assessments, their standards for grading student work are also consistent. The principal also reported that a review of teachers' daily grades from exit tickets and interim assessment data showed teacher grades for 5th grade students to be consistent.

The Second-Year External Inspection team reviewed nine work sample folders for kindergarten students, including 10 reading samples, 45 writing samples, and 20 math samples; five work sample folders for 1st grade students, including 11 reading samples, 14 writing samples, and 18 math samples; seven work sample folders for 2nd grade students, including six reading samples, 26 writing samples, and seven math samples; and five work sample folders for 5th grade students, including six reading samples, nine writing samples, and 12 math samples. These work samples were consistent with the school's curricular scope and sequence. The inspection team's review disclosed that teachers had used rubrics, closely matched to the New York State writing rubrics to evaluate student writing and other work products. The team's review of the work samples confirmed that teachers used common standards for grading student work.

The middle grades principal told the Second-Year External Inspection team that she prepares the Accountability Plan progress report for the middle school grades and that the elementary principal writes the Accountability Plan Progress Report for the elementary grades. The principals share these progress reports with the teachers at their sites and with the board of trustees. Each student's family receives mid-term student progress reports after the first six weeks of each trimester and student report cards in December, April, and July. As stated earlier, the school also sends letters to families regarding students' reading levels. According to the principals, they each review the Accountability Plan goals with all parents of new students to their schools when the parents register their children before the start of the school year.

- **To what extent does the school have a clearly defined and aligned curriculum? Does the school use its defined and aligned curriculum to prepare students to meet state performance standards?**

According to the principals and teachers interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team, the curriculum guides and alignments to the New York State performance standards for English language arts and mathematics are provided by Achievement First, Inc., although mathematics teachers also use supplementary materials. The Second-Year External Inspection team's review of the writing and reading curriculum for the kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade showed that the curriculum consisted of a pacing guide designed by Achievement First, Inc. The inspection team's review showed that the pacing guide was aligned to New York State performance standards, and listed the skills to be taught and assessed during each six-week interim assessment block. The pacing guide included writing and reading interim assessments aligned to New York State performance standards. The pacing guide listed no teaching resources, such as texts or worksheets, aligned with the skills taught during the six-week interval, nor did it provide pacing of skills for shorter time blocks, such as a weekly or monthly guide. The school's reading curriculum used Reading Mastery 1, 2, 3, which is aligned with the state standards.

The mathematics curricular documents for the kindergarten and 1st grade consisted only of a pacing guide designed by Achievement First, Inc. listing the New York State performance standards in order and dividing them into two half-year blocks. The mathematics curriculum for the 2nd grade also consisted of a pacing guide designed by Achievement First, Inc.; this pacing guide listed the New York State performance standards by six-week time blocks. Both pacing guides included interim mathematics assessments aligned to the New York State performance standards.

The school's history curriculum guides for the kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade were developed internally by grade-level teams. The Second-Year External Inspection team's review of these guides showed that they included a scope and sequence and a pacing guide listing four topics, such as continents, maps, and explorers in North America, for each grade level. The curriculum guides showed pacing broken down by unit; each unit indicated the approximate number of weeks for instruction, the key vocabulary words students should learn, and interim assessments. According to teachers interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team, teachers referred to the New York State performance standards during the development of the history curriculum guides to ensure alignment with the standards. Teachers also told the inspection team that they consulted the Core Knowledge program for guidance in developing the scope and sequence chart for each grade level and the grade level units and assessments for social studies.

Elementary teachers told the Second-Year External Inspection team that they used the Full Option Science System (FOSS), an inquiry-based, modular science program, for kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade. Teachers reported using the FOSS pacing guides and science materials as curriculum resources; they told the inspection team that they developed their own interim science assessments.

The Second-Year External Inspection team's review of middle grades curricula indicated that the 5th grade scope and sequence materials for English language arts and mathematics are largely based on the content and curricular alignments provided by Achievement First, Inc. and used by Achievement First, Inc.'s computer-based assessments; the latter are aligned to and fully cover the New York State performance standards. For English language arts, Achievement First, Inc. provides scope and sequence and pacing guides for textual analysis and grammar aligned with New York State performance standards. Teachers use novel units, which included the reading skills to be taught, that are used by other teachers in the Achievement First, Inc. school network. The school supplements the Achievement First, Inc. reading curriculum with the SRA Decoding Program.

The 5th grade mathematics curriculum uses Math Labs by Marilyn Burns as well as mathematics workbooks created by Achievement First, Inc. According to the middle grades principal, school staff were in the process of reviewing Investigations in Number, Data, and Space and the Connected Math program as possible supplementary curriculum materials for the 5th grade mathematics program.

The Second-Year External Inspection team learned, through interviews with the middle grades principal and 5th grade social studies teachers and reviews of curriculum documents, that the 5th grade social studies teachers create their own social studies pacing guides and assessments and use History Alive and Geography Alive curriculum materials as the foundations of their lessons. Science teachers use the pacing guides within the Full Option Science System (FOSS) and the FOSS materials as resources for the 5th grade science curriculum.

Based on interviews with principals and teachers with confirmation from documents, teachers created curriculum guides for social studies on their own and used a commercial scope and sequence for science; however, teachers ensured that all of these materials covered and aligned with all New York State performance standards.

The curriculum reviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team was standards-based and aligned to the New York State performance standards. During interviews with the inspection team, teachers reported aligning their lessons to the curriculum and then using the results from the standards-based interim assessments to formatively direct and modify instruction within their classrooms to improve student achievement.

The Second-Year External Inspection team reviewed lesson plans prepared by six teachers at Achievement First Bushwick; the lesson plans included one kindergarten teacher's lesson plan for guided reading and mathematics; two 1st grade teachers' lesson plans for guided reading, science, and social studies; two 2nd grade teachers' lesson plans for English language arts and mathematics; and one 5th grade special education teacher's lesson plan for English language arts. The inspection team found that the lesson plans substantially aligned with the school's curriculum guidelines, scope and sequence, and pacing charts for each subject. The lesson plans stated the lesson objective and indicated how teachers would assess student understanding. The lesson objectives were aligned with the interim assessment skills that teachers assessed at the end of every grading period for instruction. The lesson plans also included examples of daily assessments, aligned with the interim assessments.

For guided reading lessons, the lesson plans cited teacher observations, graphic organizers, conferencing, and a final copy of writing assignment as daily assessments. For mathematics, the lesson plans cited teacher observations and unit assessments. For science, the lesson plans cited drawing pictures showing a concept, writing or drawing in journals, and oral explanations. For social studies, the lesson plans cited teacher observations. The inspection team found that the alignment of the curriculum was consistent within grade levels and flowed in a logical progression from one grade level to the next in kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade. During interviews with the Second-Year External Inspection team, elementary teachers told the inspection team that teacher communication between grades was effective and that teachers had access to and routinely reviewed assessment results from the previous year. The two principals told the inspection team that staff at both school sites will need to work together to address the issues of vertical articulation of the curriculum as the school adds more grade levels and that the alignment of the school's curriculum to New York State performance standards will promote vertical articulation.

- **What evidence indicates that the school is guided by strong instructional leadership?**

At the time of the Second-Year External Inspection team's visit, Achievement First Bushwick Charter School had assigned a principal to each of the two school locations: the elementary site attended by kindergarten, 1st grade, and second grade students, and the middle school site attended by 5th grade students. In addition to the principal, the leadership team at each site included an academic dean and a dean of students, both of whom reported to the principal. This arrangement differed from that shown on the organization chart provided to the inspection team: the organization chart showed only one principal, dean of students, and academic dean employed by the school. The organization chart shared with the inspection team did not indicate that such was the structure for each location.

The Second-Year External Inspection team conducted an interview with the principals and the elementary academic dean. The Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations, who serves as a liaison between the school and Achievement First, Inc., attended and participated in the interview. The inspection team learned that the two principals, assisted by the academic deans, serve as the instructional leaders at their school sites: they are responsible for setting the visions, goals, and priorities for their school sites and for evaluating and supervising the teachers at their sites. The principals report to the board of trustees. The academic deans and the deans of students report to their respective principals. The academic deans are responsible for supporting teacher instruction; the deans of students are responsible for supporting school culture, assisting teachers in managing student behavior, and guiding students in making good choices.

The principals told the Second-Year External Inspection team that their vision, goals, and priorities for their schools are consistent with Achievement First Bushwick's Accountability Plan goals. As

previously noted in the section of this report that concerns the school's assessments, the principals distribute Accountability Plan progress reports to the teachers at their schools and to the board of trustees. They also shared the Accountability Plan goals with every parent who registered a new student for school. During interviews with and classroom observations of teachers, the inspection team members observed that teachers understood the importance of and demonstrated their commitment to improving student achievement as required by Achievement First Bushwick's Accountability Plan.

The Second-Year External Inspection team found that the leadership teams at both school sites had instituted a system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness. According to the principals, formal evaluations are undertaken twice each year using a nine-page evaluation instrument entitled "AF Professional Growth Plan." This evaluation instrument, which the inspection team reviewed, lists a series of evaluation criteria such as classroom set-up and discipline, standards-based lesson planning, and specific reading instruction practices. It also contains a rubric listing the following categories: "excellent," "good," "fair," and "area for growth." The instrument includes space for examples in each category. The evaluator, who is either the principal or the academic dean, completes a section of the instrument with the evaluator's assessment of the teacher, and the teacher completes another section of the instrument with a self-assessment. The final two pages of the evaluation instrument require the evaluator and the teacher to describe two to four areas of strength and two to four areas where performance could be improved, citing specific examples in each area. According to the principals and teachers interviewed by the inspection team, the evaluator and the teacher meet at mid-year and in June to discuss the completed evaluation. At the June meeting, the evaluator and the teacher sign the evaluation, which is placed in the teacher's file.

The Second-Year External Inspection team reviewed four completed elementary teacher evaluations and two middle grades teacher evaluations. The evaluations reviewed by the inspection team contained evaluator notes of observations conducted during visits to the teachers' classrooms as well as completed evaluation instruments. The principals told the Second-Year External Inspection team that one counselor and two classroom teachers were not rehired for the 2007-08 school year.

At the time of the Second-Year External Inspection visit, Achievement First Bushwick was in the process of developing a portfolio system for teachers. The inspection team reviewed a draft document that required each teacher to maintain a teacher learning and development binder. According to the principals, this binder will contain Achievement First, Inc. protocols, lesson plans, and student achievement data and will serve to document and underscore the importance of teachers' learning goals.

The Second-Year External Inspection team found that Achievement First Bushwick principals provide direct, ongoing coaching and support to teachers. According to the elementary principal, the practice of matching an experienced teacher with a novice teacher in each classroom was initiated in the 2006-07 school year. Elementary teachers interviewed by the inspection team stated that they did not usually co-teach the same lesson; rather, each teacher had varied groups of students for which they were responsible and that each teacher developed his or her own curriculum for the assigned groups while maintaining communication with the other teacher.

Middle grades teachers interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team stated that, because the middle school has only the 5th grade right now, the principal visits classrooms on a daily basis and often writes email messages or notes to teachers after such visits. The teachers also told the inspection team, and the middle grades principal confirmed, that teachers ask colleagues to watch them teach and provide written suggestions to them for improving their instructional practices. The

inspection team reviewed several examples of the feedback sheets used by teachers to comment on other teachers' instruction.

According to principals, the elementary academic dean, and the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations, Achievement First Bushwick teachers are recruited by Achievement First, Inc., which employs a full-time recruiter who screens applications and conducts telephone interviews with prospective candidates. The recruiter meets with the principals, who provide feedback to the recruiter concerning the teaching candidates needed at their school sites. Prospective teacher candidates are required to teach a demonstration lesson at the school seeking to fill a vacancy. According to the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations, the school received 2,500 applications for 60 positions in the 2006-07 school year.

- **Is high quality instruction evident throughout the school?**

The Second-Year External Inspection team observed 22 classes at Achievement First Bushwick: 14 classes at the elementary grades site and eight classes at the middle grades site. The inspection team observed every core subject teacher at each school site at least once. At the elementary level, the classroom observations included seven reading classes, two writing classes, three mathematics classes, one social skills class, and one martial arts class. The inspection team observed three kindergarten classes, three 1st grade classes, and three 2nd grade classes; each class was taught by two teachers. The 5th grade classes observed by the inspection team included three English language arts classes, three mathematics classes, one music class, and one special education class; each class was taught by one teacher. The classrooms observed by the inspection team were very clean, well maintained, and equipped with abundant resources.

The pairs of kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade teachers observed by the Second-Year External Inspection team provided differentiated instruction to two or more groups of students at a time. In the 5th grade classes observed by the inspection team, teachers grouped students homogenously by ability in core subjects, with students in need of extra help placed in smaller classes.

The Second-Year External Inspection team reviewed certification information for Achievement First Bushwick teachers and found that 24 of 33 teachers were certified, including a 5th grade teacher who was certified to teach "Biology 7-12." The certified teachers included two music teachers and one art teacher; all others were core-subject teachers. All but one teacher observed by the inspection team demonstrated subject-matter competency.

As previously discussed in the section of this report that concerns Achievement First Bushwick's curriculum, all lesson plans reviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team stated the lesson objective. Teachers focused lessons on previously identified learning objectives in all classes observed by the Second-Year External Inspection team. Teachers frequently explained their learning expectations to the students. Because teachers made their high learning expectations clear to the students, students maintained an active involvement throughout the lessons observed. Students were engaged in focused, purposeful activities in all classrooms observed. The classrooms were orderly and the students were responsive to behavioral expectations of the teachers.

The elementary classes observed by the Second-Year Inspection team included varied groupings such as small groups and pair-share, showing clear evidence that lesson content was matched to student skill levels and exhibited high levels of differentiated instruction. For example, a kindergarten reading teacher used instructional methods that targeted different types of learners, including kinesthetic, visual and auditory. The elementary classrooms also had a number of different

areas where students could gather for assorted group activities. Teachers' instructional methods targeted different types of learners, kinesthetic, visual, and auditory learners. Instruction was delivered efficiently, with clear expectations: for example, one teacher explained the lesson objective to the students and communicated the expectations that students meet that standard. She then assessed student learning by observing the students and listening for mispronunciations.

The Second-Year Inspection team observed some degree of grouping variation in three of the four 5th grade classes observed. For example, one middle grades English language arts teacher allowed children to select books from baskets based on their interest and reading ability. The teacher then grouped these students by book title and asked them to work together while the teacher spent time on individual discussions of books and related class work with one-third of the students in the class. The teacher told the inspection team that she planned to meet with each student in the class individually during that week. The inspection team also observed that 5th grade teachers differentiated instruction as needed when individual students needed extra assistance. The Second-Year External Inspection team observed that students came to class prepared and that teachers made productive use of their instructional time. Students clearly understood their roles and responsibilities within the classrooms and made effective transitions.

In addition, the teachers observed by the Second-Year External Inspection team effectively used an inquiry model of instruction. Teachers often asked students thought-provoking questions and scaffolded discussion to enable the students to formulate answers. For example, one 5th grade teacher used a Venn diagram to assist students in evaluating character dialogue, allowing students to answer challenging questions effectively. Inspection team members observed inquiry-based teaching in most elementary classes and in approximately half of the 5th grade classes.

- **Does the school have programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals (including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education)?**

Achievement First Bushwick provides a range of services for students requiring additional academic supports. According to the school's elementary and middle grades learning specialists, the school's pre-referral process includes embedded at-risk intervention services and referrals to the school's Child Study Team (CST). During the pre-referral process, the learning specialists recommend supports for students who are struggling academically, such as tutoring and modifications of instruction. According to an Achievement First Bushwick document entitled "At-Risk Intervention Services and Referral Process" provided to the Second-Year External Inspection team, the school's ongoing intervention services include grouping based on student needs, small group tutoring during the day or after school, one-on-one behavioral support with the dean of students, daily behavioral progress sheets, and other classroom interventions. Teachers refer students for whom recommended interventions are not successful to the CST, which then meets to develop an action plan. Over the following weeks, the action plan is implemented and monitored by the CST. Some students may then be referred for a special education evaluation. Initial evaluations are performed by special education staff at the New York City schools. During the 2007-08 school year, according to the learning specialists, four students in elementary grades and one student in 5th grade were referred for evaluation.

At the time of the Second-Year External Inspection report, according to the learning specialists, 20 Achievement First Bushwick students had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs): 13 were elementary students, and seven were 5th grade students. At the elementary level, nine students were classified as speech/language disabled, one student as learning disabled, one student as the autistic, one student as emotionally disturbed, and one student as other health impaired. At the middle grades site, three students were classified as speech/language disabled, three students as learning disabled, and one as other health impaired. At the elementary site, the learning specialist provides push-in services to five students, pull-out services to five students, and consultant teacher services to 12 students. Specialists provide speech/language therapy services to nine students and counseling services to two students at the elementary site through a related service authorization (RSA) voucher process, which allows parents or guardians of students requiring special education programs/services to obtain needed services, such as speech or counseling, from an independent provider of their choice at no cost to the parents or guardians. At the middle grades site, the learning specialist provides pull-out services to six students and consultant teacher services to seven students. Specialists provide speech/language therapy services to four students and counseling services to one student at the middle grades site through the RSA voucher process.

The learning specialists told the Second-Year External Inspection team that they monitor the achievement of each student that receives special education services throughout the school year and then revisits the students' IEPs at each student's annual meeting. When students perform well in the inclusion setting and need little support from the learning specialist, the school ensures that a re-evaluation is scheduled to determine whether the student should exit from the special education program.

According to the learning specialists, Achievement First Bushwick enrolled 19 elementary students with Section 504 plans in the 2007-08 school year; all students qualified for medical reasons. The school enrolled no 5th grade students with Section 504 plans. At the time of the Second-Year External Inspection visit, one English Language Learner (ELL) was enrolled at the elementary site, and seven additional elementary students were being referred for ELL services. There were no students identified as ELL in the 5th grade. According to the elementary learning specialist, the school identifies ELL students through home language questionnaires that screen all new enrollees for potential limited English proficiency and conducts informal interviews with each enrollee in the student's native language, if the latter is not English. The school administers the Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R) to students with limited English proficiency to determine their eligibility for ELL services. Classroom teachers are responsible for observing their students throughout the school day in order to identify those that have limited English proficiency and may request that a student be assessed for eligibility to receive ELL services. The learning specialists use results from the New York State English as a Second Language Aptitude Test to determine whether ELL students' English language growth meets or exceeds the benchmark established by the state to exit the students from the ELL program. For students who meet or exceed the benchmark, the learning specialists meet with students' parents to approve the ELL students' exit from the ELL program.

Achievement First Bushwick meets the needs of students for academic remediation by providing small group instruction for reading, writing, and mathematics; after school tutoring; Saturday school for middle grades students requiring additional academic support, special education teacher support services, one-on-one tutoring, and at-risk counseling. According to the learning specialists at both school sites, Achievement First Bushwick used some of its Title I money to support these interventions. At the time of the Second-Year External Inspection visit, the learning specialists

reported that 80 to 90 elementary students and 87 5th grade students were receiving small group instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics; 50 elementary school students and 13 5th grade students were receiving special education teacher support services; 20 elementary students and 30 5th grade students were receiving after-school tutoring; 15 elementary students and a variable number of 5th grade students were receiving one-on-one tutoring; five elementary students were receiving at-risk counseling; and 18 5th grade students were attending Saturday school. According to the learning specialists, teachers and teaching teams assign students to interventions based on their performance on interim assessments as well as teacher recommendations and parent requests. According to the elementary learning specialist, Achievement First Bushwick retained two students at the elementary level at the end of the 2006-07 school year; neither student had an IEP.

The Second-Year External Inspection team's review of the elementary and middle grades versions of the handbook showed that the elementary version of the family handbook lists the school's REACH Club and after school tutoring/study hall; the middle grades version of the family handbook lists after school tutoring/study hall. The REACH Club is an after-school academic intervention program at the elementary level; the REACH acronym refers to respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship, and hard work. Elementary students requiring targeted instruction in reading or mathematics are invited by the school to participate in the REACH Club.

- **To what extent does the school's culture allow and promote a learning environment?**

The Second-Year External Inspection team found that Achievement First Bushwick's strong school culture promotes a culture of learning. The school has a clear discipline policy that is documented in the school's family handbooks, well understood by school community members, and consistently applied.

According to the elementary dean of students, the Achievement First Bushwick discipline policies for the elementary and middle grades are based on the REACH values of respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship, and hard work. In an example provided by the elementary dean of students, teachers post a behavior chart in each classroom and use the chart to positively reinforce appropriate behavior. Several teachers said that any student who moved to the top of the behavior chart was considered to be "in college." The Second-Year External Inspection team observed several students who reached this level; each was extremely excited at this accomplishment. Reflection journals, another strategy mentioned, were in place for those students struggling to manage their behavior. The Second-Year External Inspection team observed this practice in classroom use and read some of the journals that students had written. At the elementary level, the school sends home a document entitled the "weekly behavior and communication log." Each night parents must review and sign this document and return it to school. The team reviewed several of these documents. According to the dean of students, one elementary student had received an out-of-school suspension during the 2007-08 school year as of the date of the Second-Year External Inspection visit.

According to the middle grades family handbook, students earn Scholar Dollars for academic performance and for appropriate behavior. At the end of the month, each student is issued a "paycheck," and the school holds special activities for the students who have earned at least 80 scholar dollars; students are also able to use their accumulated scholar dollars to pay for school field trips and special events. Fifth grade students interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team were very aware of the school's discipline policy and excited about earning dollars. According to the middle grades principal, no 5th grade students had been suspended during the 2007-08 school year as of the date of the Second-Year External Inspection visit.

To support the teaching of character skills and to help students learn to make better choices at the elementary, teachers use the Second Step program and the Heartwood program to teach social skills. A daily cooperative play or activity time for student application and reinforcement of these character skills is scheduled daily. At the end of each month, elementary and middle grades students refer to the REACH rubric in the family handbook to assess and set goals for themselves for the next month. Teachers then assess each student using the same rubric. Students who earn all five letters received the school's highest honor for that month, the REACH Award.

In interviews with Achievement First Bushwick principals and teachers, the Second-Year External Inspection team learned that the school leadership had taken several actions before the start of the 2007-08 school year to establish a positive school culture and to be proactive in support of learning. Three weeks before school began, all new teachers attended professional development training that focused on school culture, behavior management strategies, and the importance of building positive student-teacher relationships. In order to orient students and parents to the school, principals met with each new student and parent or guardian for an hour before the start of the school year. During the course of this initial meeting, the principal explained the academic and behavioral expectations for students at the school, and the student and parent are asked to sign a teacher-parent-student contract. This contract commits each signer to timeliness, communication, and homework expectations, as well as other guidelines.

The Second-Year External Inspection team observed that classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued. During the two days that the inspection team spent observing classrooms and walking through the hallways of the school, the inspection team observed students who were well behaved, enthusiastic about their learning, and respectful to each other and their teachers. The inspection team also observed that low-level misbehavior was not tolerated in the classrooms or hallways and that the school has established a safe and orderly environment.

In classrooms at both school sites, the inspection team observed that teachers positively reinforced students, using the REACH language, for making good choices and reminded students about inappropriate choices. The inspection team observed that the dean of students at the elementary site greeted and shook hands with students at the start of the school day. He told the inspection team that he believed that his practice of greeting students set the tone for the day and allowed him to become aware of any problems that children might have as they came to school. The dean of students was also a highly visible presence in the hallways and in classrooms before, during, and after school. At both school sites, every visitor was required to sign in with the resource officer posted at the entrance to the building and to wear a visitor's badge. Teachers, students, and parents interviewed by the inspection team said that they felt Achievement First Bushwick to be a safe place.

- **Does the school's professional development program assist teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge?**

Achievement First Bushwick allocates sufficient resources to support a professional development program and provides school-wide training in the school culture and discipline procedures. The Second-Year External Inspection Team reviewed the Achievement First, Inc. professional development plan for the 2007-08 school year. The plan showed, and the inspection team's interviews with principals confirmed, that Achievement First Bushwick began its professional development program in the summer of 2007, three weeks before the school year began; this summer

program is summarized below. The plan also showed that Achievement First, Inc. provided formal training to teachers in the Achievement First, Inc. school network in New York and Connecticut in October and March 2008.

The first week of summer teacher training was provided by Achievement First, Inc. at the organization's main office in New Haven, Connecticut for teachers in the Achievement First, Inc. school network in New York and Connecticut; the training focused on Achievement First, Inc. systems and school culture. The second week of summer teacher training was provided in New York at another Achievement First, Inc. location in Crown Heights, New York, for all teachers in the New York Achievement First, Inc. school network. At the elementary level, the training included phonics, Saxon Math, and pedagogical approaches such as literacy training; the middle grades program provided content-specific training. In the third week, Achievement First Bushwick principals provided teachers with school-specific training at the school focused on team building, common language, specific roles and support, and school culture. According to the principals, the school does not conduct a school-wide professional development needs assessment, nor does the school systematically evaluate the professional development program described above to determine its effectiveness.

During the school year, professional development for teachers is scheduled on Friday afternoons: students are dismissed at 1:45 p.m., and teachers meet from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m. According to the elementary principal, some of this time is used for staff meetings and special school occasions; the time is also devoted to discussions of data collection strategies, analysis of recent assessment data, and lesson plan preparation. The previous section of this report that concerns Achievement First Bushwick's assessments discusses the achievement meetings and data days during which school administrators and teachers work together to review assessment data and develop strategies for improving student achievement; these meetings, as well as the Friday meetings, enabled the principals to provide embedded professional development to teachers.

According to the principals, they are able to address the professional development needs of individual teachers quickly and with specificity. Principals told the inspection team that they demonstrate lessons for teachers, discuss instructional strategies with teachers, and help teachers plan lessons on an ongoing basis. The school's achievement meetings and data days also support professional development at the school, according to the principals. Principals, academic deans, and teachers work collaboratively at these meetings to review and develop plans based on assessment data; in addition, the principals use these meetings to help teachers plan lessons, model lessons, and discuss instructional strategies with teachers.

The Institute's First-Year Evaluation letter noted that teachers had indicated a desire for further professional development activities that were differentiated based on the experience levels of the teachers. As discussed above, much of the formal professional development received by teachers is provided by Achievement First, Inc. and is not differentiated by individual school. However, the school-wide professional development activities undertaken by the principals are targeted to teachers' experience levels and needs. Teachers interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team stated that they felt supported by the school's professional development program and assistance provided by the principals. They also noted that they were provided with opportunities to attend conferences that contributed to their professional growth and teaching practice. For example, one teacher mentioned that she had attended the conference of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Part 2. Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Organizational Viability

A. Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?

- **To what extent is the school faithful to its mission?**

The mission of the Achievement First Bushwick Charter School is as follows:

Achievement First Bushwick Charter School is a public charter school focused on strengthening the academic and character skills needed for all students to excel in top tier colleges, to achieve success in a competitive world, and to serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities.

Achievement First Bushwick's academic program focuses on strengthening the academic skills of its students. The previous sections of this report that concern the school's assessments, curriculum, instruction, and academic supports have described the school's use of assessment data to modify curriculum and instruction and the school's approach to providing struggling students with academic support in order to improve student achievement. The previous section of this report that concerns Achievement First Bushwick's culture has described the school's efforts to develop students' character skills by providing instruction in social skills using materials from the Second Step and Heartwood programs. The Second-Year External Inspection team observed that teachers and administrators at Achievement First Bushwick continuously reminded students that they were "scholars" and conveyed the belief that each student could be successful in college and take a leadership role in the community. Two 5th grade teachers told the inspection team that the school's mission was to close the socioeconomic gap between the school's students and college-bound students from other schools by preparing all students for college.

All 5th grade students and several parents interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team were aware of and could articulate the school's mission to prepare students for college. The 5th grade students were able to name colleges, such as Fordham University and William Paterson University, that interested them. One student told the inspection team that he planned to attend the college attended by Stephen Hawking so that he could be a great scientist as well. Parents also told the inspection team that the school prepared students for college from kindergarten onward.

- **Has the school implemented the key design elements included in its charter?**

The first key design element of the Achievement First Bushwick's charter is as follows: "an unwavering focus on breakthrough student achievement, including fully closing the achievement gap." The school's focus on improving student achievement has been discussed above and in the previous sections of this report that concern Achievement First Bushwick's assessments, curriculum, instruction, and academic supports.

The second key design element of the school's charter is as follows: "consistent, proven, standards-based curriculum, including what is taught at every grade level is defined clearly and systematically so that all essential content is mastered over time." The Second-Year External Inspection team found that Achievement First Bushwick has implemented this design element. As discussed in the previous section of this report that concerns the school's curriculum, the school uses a standards-based

curriculum that is well defined and aligned with New York State performance standards. Teachers assess student mastery of the curriculum by administering interim assessments that are also aligned with New York State performance standards.

The third key design element of the school's charter is as follows: "interim assessments and strategic use of performance data, including standards-based assessments administered every 6 weeks in all core subjects and individual instructional plans developed in conjunction with school leaders for each teacher based on assessment results." Achievement First Bushwick has implemented standards-based assessments, as previously discussed in the section of this report that concerns the school's assessments. Some interim assessments in science and social studies are administered at the end of curriculum units rather than every six weeks. As discussed in the previous section of this report that concerns Achievement First Bushwick Assessments, teachers meet periodically to review the results of the interim assessments and develop individual instructional plans in collaboration with school leaders and other teachers; the plans include strategies for re-teaching standards not yet mastered by each teacher's students and assignment of students to small groups or one-on-one interventions as well as new standards to be taught during the next six weeks.

The fourth key design element of the school's charter is as follows: "more time on task, including three hours daily for reading instruction in elementary grades and three hours of instruction in reading and writing in the middle school grades." The Second-Year External Inspection team's review of the school schedule for Achievement First Bushwick showed that this design element has been implemented: the schedule included three hours of daily reading instruction in the elementary grades and three hours of daily reading and writing instruction in the 5th grade. The schedule also showed that the school day began at 7:15 a.m. and ended at 4:00 p.m.; the longer school day provides more time for academic work.

The fifth key design element of the school's charter is as follows: "principals with the power to lead." As discussed in the section of this report that concerns Achievement First Bushwick's instructional leadership, the principals serve as the instructional leaders of their schools; they provide ongoing coaching and guidance to teachers. In this respect, the school has given the principals "the power to lead."

The sixth key design element of the school's charter is as follows: "increased supervision of the quality of instruction, including a School Manager to handle operational issues, a Dean of Students to coordinate discipline, and an Academic Dean in the school's second year, all of which will free the Principal up to focus on instruction." Achievement First Bushwick has implemented this charter design element. The school's staff include a director of operations and a school manager, both of whom handle business operations; two academic deans who assist the principal with curriculum and instruction issues; and two deans of students who handle student discipline issues and support teachers in managing student behavior.

The seventh key design element of the school's charter, "aggressive recruitment of teaching talent," has been fulfilled by Achievement First, Inc. In the 2006-07 school year, according to the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations, more than 2,500 applicants applied for 60 vacancies, indicating that Achievement First, Inc. recruited applicants aggressively. The principals reported satisfaction with the quality of the teaching candidates provided by Achievement First, Inc.

The eighth key design element of the school's charter, "discipline, achievement-oriented school culture," has been implemented. As previously discussed in the sections of this report that concern Achievement First Bushwick's instruction and culture, the Second-Year External inspection team observed that teachers emphasized the REACH values (respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship, and hard work) throughout the school day. The school's family handbook contains a REACH rubric. At the end of each month, students use the REACH rubric to assess and set goals for themselves for the next month. Teachers subsequently use the same rubric to determine how well students met their own classroom work and behavioral goals. Students who earned all five letters receive the school's highest honor for that month, the REACH Award.

The ninth key design element of the school's charter is as follows: "rigorous, high-quality, focused training for principals and leaders, including a 'residency' year before implementing the program and a minimum of 3 weeks of high-quality professional development before the school year begins for all teachers." Principals told the Second-Year External Inspection team reported that they had received training from Achievement First, Inc. All teachers received three weeks of professional development before the start of the 2007-2008 school year.

The tenth key design element of the school's charter is as follows: "parents and community as partners, including parent 'contracts'." As discussed in the section of this report that concerns Achievement First Bushwick's culture, teachers, parents, and students at the school signed a teacher-parent-student contract at the outset of the 2007-08 school year committing each signer to work together to support the student's education. Parents interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team stated that they considered themselves to be partners with the school: for example, the middle grades principal told the inspection team that the school had provided parents with the history textbook and syllabus to keep at their homes in order for parents to be partners in helping their children.

B. Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?

- **To what extent are parents/guardians and students satisfied with the school?**

The Second-Year External Inspection team interviewed two parent focus groups: the elementary level focus group included two parents of kindergarten students and one parent of a 1st grade student, and the middle grades focus group included four parents of 5th grade students. All parents interviewed by the inspection team expressed extremely positive views of Achievement First Bushwick. They expressed the view that the school is a safe place with a strong disciplinary system that enables their children to become more responsible for their own behavior and choices. The parent of an elementary student told the inspection team that she had selected the school because she wanted her child to be idealistic and also realistic about her ideals.

The parents interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team also offered positive comments on the school's communications with parents. They said that the school's weekly newsletter is printed in English and Spanish, parent meetings are conducted in Spanish when necessary, teachers regularly send home completed student work, teachers notify parents when their children are not performing, and the student report cards they receive explain the school's grading system. The parents noted that the teacher-parent-student contract signed by teachers, parents, and students is an expression of the school's commitment to working collaboratively with students and their families. One parent, a leader in the school's Parent Leadership Council, said that the parent

Leadership Council worked to make parents feel that they are a welcome part of the school family. Many parents described Achievement First Bushwick as a community and a “family.”

The parents interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team expressed pride in the school and its positive impact on their children. They said that the teachers at Achievement First Bushwick have high academic expectations for all students. All parents felt that the teachers represented the great strength of Achievement First Bushwick because the teachers care about their students and about their academic progress. All parents interviewed stated that their children would be returning to Achievement First Bushwick for the 2008-09 school year.

The parents interviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team reported that they had completed parent satisfaction surveys but had not yet seen the results. The elementary and middle grades principals told the inspection team that they had not yet compiled the survey results.

The Second-Year External Inspection team also interviewed two student focus groups: the elementary focus group included two kindergarten students, two 1st grade students, and two 2nd grade students; the middle grades focus group included seven 5th grade students. The students, especially those in the 5th grade, were enthusiastic about Achievement First Bushwick. The students described Achievement First Bushwick as a safe environment where students can learn. They expressed positive views of the school’s disciplinary system, noting that there were consequences for negative behavior; they said that they do not experience disruptive behavior on the part of other students during the school day. One student quoted his teacher as saying that “character is what you do when no one is watching.” They also said that the system of “scholar dollars” helped students make better choices and that they liked the fact that positive behavior was rewarded with trips. One student told the inspection team that he had been a bully at his previous school, that he had come to Achievement First Bushwick to change his bad habits, and had done so. All students interviewed by the inspection team stated that teachers and administrators at the school do not tolerate bullying. Several students told the Second-Year External Inspection team that Achievement First Bushwick had helped them to love reading and to become better readers. They said that their teachers helped them to become excited about learning, challenged them, helped them understand difficult material, and enabled them to succeed. They also said that they felt able to discuss problems with their teachers.

Student attendance rates as of April 2008 were as follows, according to school records reviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team: for the elementary grades, the year-to-date average daily student attendance was 96.5 percent; for 5th grade, the year-to-date average daily student attendance rate was 97 percent.

School records for April 2008 showed that Achievement First Bushwick had a waitlist of 348 elementary school students: 100 were waiting for kindergarten slots, 135 were waiting for 1st grade slots, and 113 were waiting for 2nd grade slots. The school also had a waitlist of four students for 5th grade slots.

School records for April 2008 also showed that five elementary students had withdrawn from Achievement First Bushwick during the 2007-08 school year: four had moved out of the state, and one had moved to a school closer to the student’s home. As of April 2008, three 5th grade students had withdrawn during the 2007-08 school year: one had left because of parental academic concerns, and two had left because of parental concerns regarding the school culture and disciplinary system.

C. Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?

- **Has the school board worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and specific goals?**

Achievement First Bushwick is governed by a board of trustees consisting of nine members. According to the board's bylaws, the allowable board size is seven to 15 members; the board chair told the inspection team that the board has decided on a board membership of 10 and that the board currently had one vacancy that it intended to fill. The board includes one representative of Achievement First, Inc., whose title is co-CEO and Superintendent, and two parent representatives (one for each of the school's locations), one of whom votes. The board focus group interview conducted by the Second-Year External Inspection team was attended only by the board chair, a founding member of the board, and the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations, who is not a board member. According to the board chair, two other board members had volunteered to participate in the interview but were unable to attend because of work obligations. The inspection team observed that the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations, in her role of supporting the board, answered or expanded upon many of the questions posed by the inspection team to the board chair.

The board chair described the board membership as stable. However, the inspection team's review of board meeting minutes from the previous two years showed the board has experienced a 40 percent turnover rate since the school's inception. At the time of the Second-Year External Inspection visit, six members of the board, including the board chair, had served on the board since the school's inception. The board meeting minutes reviewed by the inspection team showed that one parent representative originally served as a voting member but subsequently became an *ex officio*, non-voting member and that an Achievement First, Inc. representative was replaced. The Second-Year External Inspection team reviewed the board meeting minutes from the previous two years. The board roster provided to the inspection team indicated that the board had a secretary and a treasurer; however, board meeting minutes reviewed by the inspection team did not indicate that the board had elected officers annually.

The board's bylaws require that the board hold one annual meeting and five regular meetings each year. According to the board chair, the board meets five times per year and holds a workshop retreat once each year. A portion of the retreat is designated time for a board meeting. The minutes reviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team showed that each board meeting held during the 2007-2008 school year began with a joint meeting of all boards of trustees of schools in Achievement First, Inc.'s New York network. After the joint meeting, individual boards held their own meetings. The minutes reviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team included a "Governance Scorecard" that was included in the packet for the Achievement First, Inc. school network meeting held in March 2008. The document indicated that in the 2007-08 school year, the board of Achievement First Bushwick had the lowest meeting attendance rate, 63.6 percent, of all boards of New York schools in the Achievement First, Inc. network. The board meeting minutes reviewed by the inspection team showed that the meeting attendance rate of the board for the previous school year had been 94 percent.

The minutes reviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team indicated that at each meeting, the board receives a written report, called a "dashboard," from the principal at each school site; these reports included detailed student enrollment, demographic, attendance, wait list, and withdrawal data,

as well as staffing and teacher attendance data. The minutes reviewed by the inspection team referenced these reports but contained no attachments; inspection team members were provided with samples of the reports.

The Second-Year External Inspection team's review of board minutes and interview with the board chair indicated that the board periodically receives oral reports from school staff regarding certain school assessments and achievement-related initiatives. According to the minutes reviewed by the inspection team, the elementary principal provided the board with information regarding student performance on the DRA assessments with the board at meetings held in March and July of 2007. The minutes from a December 2007 meeting referenced the 5th grade's administration of interim assessments but not the results from the assessments; the minutes from the same meeting discussed curriculum development issues and mathematics performance in the elementary level. The minutes from a January 2008 meeting specifically discussed interim assessment results for the elementary level but not for the 5th grade.

However, the Second-Year External Inspection team saw no evidence to indicate that board receives regular reports in writing from the school leadership regarding key indicators of the school's academic progress or that the board regularly receives detailed presentations of, or engages in detailed discussions of, assessment results or of strategies implemented by the principals to improve student performance. According to the board chair, Achievement First Bushwick's assessment results are reviewed during the portion of the board meeting that involves all boards in the Achievement First, Inc. school network. She also told the inspection team that the principals notify her when assessment results are available and invite her to view the results.

The minutes reviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team contained evidence that the board discussed the Saturday tutoring program at the middle grades site and the need to budget for the program in the future. A financial update, often provided by Achievement First, Inc. was on the agenda for each board meeting. The minutes also included budget discussions, a board vote on the school budgets for the 2007-2008 school year, and evidence that the board discussed and approved a parent involvement policy as well as a fiscal policies and procedures handbook developed by Achievement First, Inc. The board chair also told the inspection team that the board has a conflict of interest policy.

The minutes reviewed by the Second-Year External Inspection team reported on the hiring of the Achievement First Bushwick principal for the middle grades. According to the minutes, the board formally interviewed a candidate proposed by Achievement First, Inc. and subsequently hired the candidate after receiving a report from Achievement First, Inc. on the candidate's performance as a dean at another school in the Achievement First, Inc. network. The minutes also indicated that the board did not require Achievement First, Inc. to comply with a provision of the agreement between Achievement First, Inc. and the board of trustees, requiring Achievement First, Inc. to propose two or three candidates to the board.

The principals told the Second-Year External Inspection team that the board holds the principals and their staff accountable for student achievement. However, the board chair told the inspection team that the Co-CEO and Superintendent of Achievement First, Inc., who serves on the board, had evaluated the principals. The board meeting minutes for the 2007-08 school year contained no evidence that the full board discussed or voted on the evaluations of the principals.

As of the Second-Year External Inspection visit, the board had not conducted a formal evaluation of Achievement First, Inc.'s performance as a vendor, according to the board chair. The Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations told the Second-Year External Inspection team that the board intends to conduct an evaluation of the performance of Achievement First, Inc. The inspection team found no evidence of board discussion of Achievement First, Inc.'s contract performance in the board meeting minutes reviewed by the inspection team.

The board chair and the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations described to the Second-Year External Inspection team the challenge confronted by the board in attempting to locate appropriate facilities for the elementary and middle grades sites for the 2007-08 school year. Although the schools is currently housed in two public school buildings, the middle grades will move to a different facility shared with another school in the 2008-09 school year, according to the board chair. The board chair told the inspection team that the board's current priority is to find a permanent location for Achievement First Bushwick.

When asked whether the board has adopted a strategic plan, the board chair and the Achievement First, Inc. director of external relations referred the Second-Year External Inspection team to the school's charter, which contains the school's mission statement and key charter design elements. The minutes reviewed by the inspection team showed that a Student Achievement Action Plan for all Achievement First, Inc. schools was presented at a meeting of the boards of all Achievement First, Inc. network schools held in September 2007.

The board chair told the Second-Year External Inspection team, and the inspection team's review of board meeting minutes confirmed, that the board's practice is to interview and vote on acceptance of prospective board members. In December 2007, according to board minutes reviewed by the inspection team, the board attempted to recruit a candidate with expertise in commercial real estate; however, the candidate decided not to join the board, citing the difficulty of committing the necessary time to the board.

VI. OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL

Academic Program

In a relatively short period of time, Achievement First Bushwick has instituted a rigorous, data-driven academic program that is supported by all school stakeholders. The school's formative assessment program, standards-based curriculum, and effective pedagogy create a literacy-rich environment with high academic expectations. These high expectations are supported by the school's culture, which rewards positive behavior and student achievement. As Achievement First Bushwick continues to expand, the school will face the challenges of developing ways to address the effective vertical articulation of the elementary and middle grades curricula and the a seamless transition of students and programs from the elementary grades to the middle grades.

Organizational Viability

The board of trustees is responsible for providing leadership and oversight of Achievement First Bushwick. The Second-Year External Inspection team found that significant governance functions typically undertaken by the board were delegated to Achievement First, Inc., such as evaluating the performance of the school principals and monitoring student achievement on a regular basis. The long-term viability of Achievement First Bushwick will depend in large part on the board's capacity to provide effective governance, including management of its contractual relationship with Achievement First, Inc., to ensure that Achievement First Bushwick succeeds and that Achievement First, Inc. continues to contribute to the school's success.

APPENDIX A:

Framework for Report Discussion

Category	Report Section (Relevant Benchmark(s))	Evidence Sources
Academic Program	School Performance Review (Renewal Benchmark 1.A)	Developed by Institute
	School Educational Program Review (Renewal Benchmarks 1.B – 1.F)	Classroom observations; Interviews; Review of documents and student work
Organizational Viability	School's Mission and Vision (Renewal Benchmark 2.B)	Review of documents; Interviews; Classroom observations
	Student and Parent Satisfaction (Renewal Benchmark 2.D.1)	Interviews; Review of school documents, including the Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Board of Trustees' Systems (Renewal Benchmark 2.C.1)	Review of documents; Interviews; Classroom observations