

X.B.

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

TO: State Board of Education
FROM: Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner of Education
DATE: February 6, 2019
SUBJECT: Update on Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Amistad Academy, and Elm City College Preparatory School

Executive Summary

Purpose

This is an update to the Connecticut State Board of Education (CSBE) on the efforts and progress being made on reducing suspensions and compliance in the areas of certification, and TEAM within Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Amistad Academy, and Elm City College Preparatory School. The update was requested by CSBE.

Background

On March 1, 2017, pursuant to Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, the CSBE approved the charter renewal of Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Amistad Academy, and Elm City College Preparatory School for the period July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2020, subject to: (a) the conditions noted in the resolution approved by the CSBE; and (b) the submission of a satisfactory report concerning the three schools certification compliance at the board's January meeting.

By May 1, 2017, each school submitted its corrective action plan for Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) review and approval to: (a) bring its staff into certification compliance; and (b) minimize behavioral incidents resulting in suspensions and expulsions by adopting a restorative discipline model for each school.

On October 2, 2018, CSDE Office of Internal Audit (OIA) sent a draft report to Dacia Toll, Chief Executive Officer of Achievement First Inc. (AFI) outlining the results of an audit conducted to determine AF's compliance with state laws regarding the implementation of the Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) program. OIA received AFI's response to the draft and incorporated their proposed corrective action plan into the final report which was sent to Dacia Toll on November 1, 2019. That corrective action plan is currently in place.

CSDE staff from the Turnaround Office and Talent Office met with school representatives on four occasions, May 22, 2017, June 13, 2017, October 2, 2017, and January 17, 2019 to discuss corrective action plan progress working towards addressing identified areas of concern.

Student Suspension Issues

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy (AFBA)

1. Renewal Requirement:

Going forward, AFBA must reduce its suspension rate. AFBA's 2016-17 suspension rate of 18.6 percent exceeds the state average of 7.0 percent and Bridgeport's average of 15.4 percent.

2. Suspension Corrective Action Plan Goal:

2016-17 Actual	2017-18 Goal	2017-18 Actual	2018-19 Goal	2019-20 Goal
18.6%	17%	14.8%	15%	13%

3. Current Status:

AFBA ended the 2017-18 school year with a suspension rate of 14.8 percent, meeting the 2017-18 target.

Amistad Academy

1. Renewal Requirement:

Going forward, Amistad must reduce its suspension rate. Amistad's 2016-17 suspension rate of 25.5 percent exceeds the state average of 7.0 percent and New Haven's average of 8.2 percent.

2. Suspension Corrective Action Plan Goal:

2016-17 Actual	2017-18 Goal	2017-18 Actual	2018-19 Goal	2019-20 Goal
25.5%	21%	18.8%	17%	13%

3. Current Status:

Amistad ended the 2017-18 school year with a suspension rate of 18.8 percent, meeting the 2017-18 target.

Elm City College Preparatory School (ECCP)

1. Renewal Requirement:

Going forward, ECCP must reduce its suspension rate. ECCP's 2016-17 suspension rate of 16.4 percent exceeds the state average of 7.0 percent and New Haven's average of 8.2 percent.

2. Suspension Corrective Action Plan Goal:

2016-17 Actual	2017-18 Goal	2017-18 Actual	2018-19 Goal	2019-20 Goal
16.4%	15%	14.2%	13%	12%

3. Current Status:
ECCP ended the 2017-18 school year with a suspension rate of 14.2 percent, meeting the 2017-18 target.

Teacher Certification Issues

Per Connecticut General Statutes, Section 10-66dd (b)(2) and 10-66dd (b)(5), all staff serving in Connecticut charter schools must hold appropriate authorizations. At least 50 percent must be serving under an initial, provisional or professional educator certificate. The remaining 50 percent may serve under other temporary authorizations, with no more than 30 percent serving under a Charter School Educator Permit (CSEP).

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy (AFBA)

1. Renewal Requirement:
AFBA must bring its staff into certification compliance. At the time of the on-site renewal visit, 60 percent (46 staff) were properly certified, whereas, 40 percent (31 staff) were out of compliance. The school was previously cited for non-certified staff during its last renewal in June 2012.
2. Corrective Action Plan:
By December 1, 2017, AFBA committed to reach 90 percent certification compliance with clear plans in place to address the remaining 10 percent of cases (e.g., enrollment in a program that will result in certification) by the end of the 2017-2018 school year.
3. Current Status:
As of January 2019, AFBA reached 87 percent certification compliance (71 out of 82 staff), whereas 13 percent (11 out of 82 staff) are out of compliance. Of those staff in compliance, 18 percent (15 staff) hold Charter School Education Permits (CSEPs) which is below the 30 percent allowed by state statute.

Amistad Academy

1. Renewal Requirement:
Amistad Academy must bring its staff into certification compliance. At the time of the on-site renewal visit, 72 percent (95 staff) were properly certified, whereas, 28 percent (37 staff) were out of compliance. The school was previously cited for non-certified staff during its last renewal in June 2012.
2. Corrective Action Plan:
By December 1, 2017, Amistad Academy committed to reach 90 percent certification compliance with clear plans in place to address the remaining 10 percent of cases (e.g. enrollment in a program that will result in certification) by the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

3. Current Status:

As of January 2019, Amistad Academy reached 89 percent certification compliance (134 out of 151 staff), whereas 11 percent (17 out of 151 staff) are out of compliance. Of those staff in compliance, 18 percent (27 staff) hold CSEPs which is below the 30 percent allowed by state statute.

Elm City College Preparatory School (ECCP)

1. Renewal Requirement:

ECCP must bring its staff into certification compliance. At the time of the on-site renewal visit, 49 percent (38 staff) were properly certified, whereas, 51 percent (40 staff) were out of compliance. The school was previously cited for non-certified staff during its last renewal in June 2012.

2. Corrective Action Plan:

By December 1, 2017, Elm City College Prep committed to reach 90 percent certification compliance with clear plans in place to address the remaining 10 percent of cases (e.g., enrollment in a program that will result in certification) by the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

3. Current Status:

As of January 2019, Elm City reached 92 percent certification compliance (58 out of 63 staff), whereas eight percent (5 out of 63 staff) are out of compliance. Of those staff in compliance, 32 percent (20 staff) hold CSEPs which is above the 30 percent allowed by state statute.

Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Issues

Per Connecticut General Statutes, Section 10-145o, to be eligible to advance from an initial certificate to a provisional certificate, beginning teachers must satisfactorily complete five TEAM instructional modules within two to three years of hire, with the expectation that they will complete two modules in their first year in the program and three modules in their second year in the program, except as otherwise provided by the Commissioner of Education. Each beginning teacher must be assigned a mentor. Each mentor shall provide 50 contact hours to each beginning teacher, with the expectation of approximately 10 contact hours per module. Each mentor shall be assigned two beginning teachers, except that in certain circumstances, a mentor may be assigned three beginning teachers with prior permission from the Connecticut Department of Education.

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy (AFBA)

1. Renewal Requirement: AFBA must ensure implementation of the TEAM Program with fidelity to the statutory requirements by ensuring 100 percent of beginning teachers complete the TEAM program by their completion deadline date (within three years of hire) to be eligible to advance their certificate. Beginning teachers must be assigned a mentor within 30 days of hire and receive a minimum of 20 hours of mentoring per year. Mentors may be assigned no more than two beginning teachers unless granted prior permission by the CSDE.

2. Corrective Action: Teachers will be required to complete two modules each year and log a minimum of 20 mentor hours per year.
3. Current Status: As of January 16, 2019, two out of the 11 teachers have a completion deadline date of September 1, 2019. They have received zero hours of mentoring and have completed zero modules. Two out of 11 have received between 10 – 20 hours of mentoring. Four teachers have received zero hours of mentoring and five teachers have received less than seven hours over the past two years.

Amistad Academy

1. Renewal Requirement: Amistad Academy must ensure implementation of the TEAM Program with fidelity to the statutory requirements by ensuring 100 percent of beginning teachers complete the TEAM program by their completion deadline date (within three years of hire) to be eligible to advance their certificate. Beginning teachers must be assigned a mentor within 30 days of hire and receive a minimum of 20 hours of mentoring per year. Mentors may be assigned no more than two beginning teachers unless granted prior permission by the CSDE.
2. Corrective Action: Amistad Academy will assign 100 percent of their new beginning teachers a mentor within 30 days of hire. Teachers will be required to complete two modules each year and log a minimum of 20 mentor hours. Effective immediately, Amistad Academy will match no more than two beginning teachers to each mentor unless granted prior permission by the CSDE.
3. Current Status: As of January 16, 2019, 20 out of 36 teachers have not been assigned a mentor. Twenty One out of 36 teachers have received zero hours of mentoring. Fifteen out 36 teachers have received between 45 minutes and three hours of mentoring over the past two years. Seven mentors have been assigned more than two beginning teachers. No request for permission has been filed. Five teachers have a completion deadline date of September 1, 2019 and have four or more TEAM instructional modules to complete by that date.

Elm City College Preparatory School (ECCP)

1. Renewal Requirement: ECCP must ensure implementation of the TEAM Program with fidelity to the statutory requirements by ensuring 100 percent of beginning teachers complete the TEAM program by their completion deadline date (within three years of hire) to be eligible to advance their certificate. Beginning teachers must be assigned a mentor within 30 days of hire and receive a minimum of 20 hours of mentoring per year. Mentors may be assigned no more than two beginning teachers unless granted prior permission by the CSDE.
2. Corrective Action: ECCP will assign 100 percent new beginning teachers a mentor within 30 days of hire. Teachers will be required to complete two modules each year and log a minimum of 20 mentor hours. Effective immediately, ECCP will match no more than two beginning teachers to each mentor unless granted prior permission by the CSDE.
3. Current Status: As of January 16, 2019, 11 out of 12 beginning teachers have been assigned a mentor. None of these teachers have received any mentoring hours. Three mentors have been assigned more than the two beginning teachers. No request for permission has been filed. One teacher has a completion deadline date of September 1, 2019 and has five TEAM instructional modules to complete.

Bilingual Certification Issues

Since 2010, schools in the Achievement First network have been mandated to provide bilingual education. Through e-mails, calls and meetings, this has been called to the attention of at least 13 AF staff members who have served as bilingual grant contacts or overseen programs for the AF network. For the 2018-2019 school year, all four Connecticut schools in the AF network are mandated to provide bilingual programming in Spanish. When a district is mandated to provide bilingual programming, the district must post for a certified bilingual teacher. If the posting does not result in the hiring of a certified bilingual teacher, the district is required to request permission from the Commissioner to use a Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teacher in lieu of a bilingual teacher ([10-17j](#)). This permission is requested through a letter.

Earlier this school year, Achievement First submitted a letter on behalf of its four Connecticut schools, but the letter did not include the requisite information. While staff members were proposed to serve in lieu of a bilingual teacher, none were TESOL certified. Of those listed by AF to serve in the TESOL in lieu of bilingual teacher capacity, two hold teacher certification in some area(s), but not in TESOL; two others hold Charter School Educator Permits (CSEP), but no TESOL certification; and one other staff member does not appear to have a bachelor's degree or teacher certification in any area.

Recommended Corrective Action: All AF schools will comply with the bilingual statute by April 3, 2019.

Next Steps and Recommendation

The CSDE proposes that Achievement First comes before the SBE in the fall of 2019 if it fails to meet the targets set forth in the recommended corrective action plan.

Prepared by: _____

Robert Kelly, Education Consultant
Turnaround Office

Julianne Frost, Education Consultant
Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification

Reviewed by: _____

Lisa Lamenzo, Bureau Chief
Turnaround Office

Approved by: _____

Desi D. Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer
Turnaround Office

Dr. Sarah J. Barzee, Chief Talent Officer
Talent Office