

Summary of the Connecticut Charter Schools Best Practices Report

Overview

This report represents a summary of the “best practices” self-reported by charter schools in 2010-11 annual reports submitted to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-66ii requires the CSDE to annually publish a report on best practices reported by governing councils of charter schools pursuant to subdivision (5) of subsection (b) of Section 10-66cc of the C.G.S., and distribute a copy of such report to each public school superintendent and governing council of each charter school.

Background

The purposes of Connecticut charter schools are to: “(1) improve academic achievement; (2) provide for educational innovation; (3) provide a vehicle for the reduction of racial, ethnic and economic isolation; and (4) provide a choice of public education programs for students and parents.”¹ To accomplish these directives, charter schools are expected to develop, implement and sustain innovative practices and procedures. The flexibility afforded to charter schools theoretically results in the development of new practices that, in turn, can be shared with other public schools.

2010-11 Best Practices

The best practices included in the annual report are self-reported by each charter school’s governing council.² They represent practices and policies that school personnel believe to be the most innovative and effective at improving academic achievement. These data were included in the “Best Practices” section of the 2010-11 annual report, which asked the school to “describe two or three of their most effective best practices employed by the school that contribute significantly to the academic success of students.” It is clear from the annual reports that the schools’ mission influences the best practices and that these practices are not limited to the classroom and the curriculum.

The data reported for best practices varied among the 16 charter schools reporting information. Some schools reported practices in great detail while others listed a brief overview in a few paragraphs or a bulleted list. Overall, the practices link to categories such as: Curricular/Academic; Social Outcomes; Learning Community; and Governance/General School Policy. Specific best practices may fit into more than one category and it is important to note that the following list is a compilation of the data provided by all schools and all of the following practices are not present in every school.

Curricular/Academic

- curriculum based on students’ individual needs
- student-created goals
- smaller class sizes
- focus on standards-based curriculum (aligned with Connecticut and national standards)
- ongoing classroom assessments inform student needs and curricular modifications
- programs’ focus on inquiry-based, hands-on learning
- a variety of enrichment classes offered before, during and after school

¹ *Public School Choice in Connecticut: A Guide for Students and Their Families, 2010-2011*. Connecticut State Department of Education

² Charter school directors or their designee typically complete this task.

Social Outcomes

- strong parent-school partnership
- a variety of social programs highlighting important social skills such as respect, consideration and tolerance
- behavioral management plans which create a safe learning environment
- school uniforms which create unity and decrease competition
- counseling offered to students in need

Learning Community

- continuous feedback given to students regarding academic progress
- weekly professional development for teachers
- weekly meetings with director of curriculum to bolster professional development and teacher support/sharing
- new teachers involved in an induction program

Governance/General School Policy

- extended day and year for additional academic opportunities
- academic growth monitored through “Must Pass Policy,” as one example, to prevent social promotion
- great teachers are recruited

Recommended Follow-up

This publication is intended to facilitate collaborative efforts between public school districts and state charter schools. CSDE recommends that superintendents contact those charter schools whose best practices might be applicable to the mission and goals of their school districts.

School Name:	Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	
Contact Person:	Debon Lewis, Director Achievement First Bridgeport - Elementary 391 East Washington Avenue Bridgeport, CT 06608 Telephone: 203-333-9128 Grades: K-5	Morgan Barth, Principal Achievement First Bridgeport Academy - Middle 529 Noble Avenue Bridgeport, CT 06608 Telephone: 203-333-9128 Grades: 6-8

BEST PRACTICES

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy (AF) is more than great schools. They are a part of the Achievement First network of high-performing public charter schools and benefits from the best practices and efficiencies created by Achievement First’s team of finance, curriculum, talent development, operations, recruitment, human capital, technology, data and external relations experts. Achievement First centralizes and coordinates professional development practices across the network, providing infrastructure and support to Achievement First Bridgeport Academy in these areas at a higher level of quality and lower cost than we would be able to on our own. The following describes the strategic use of a professional development practice at Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, and across the Achievement First network, to drive high student achievement. Building on a strong background in recruiting, training and developing excellent educators, AF is now launching its Teacher Career Pathway – a groundbreaking teacher evaluation and compensation program designed to foster excellence and reduce attrition.

Teacher Career Pathway is a systematic, coordinated approach to recognizing and developing great teachers as they progress through five career stages (intern, new teacher, teacher, senior teacher, master teacher). These stages were developed to celebrate excellent teachers and are accompanied by increased compensation, recognition and professional growth opportunities. The Teacher Career Pathway program builds off of a number of practices already in place – lesson observation and feedback, peer feedback, parent surveys, student surveys and analyzing student achievement data – but it puts these items altogether in a more systematic and coordinated way.

Research shows – and it is clear at AF schools - that the effectiveness of the classroom teacher is one of the most important factor supporting student achievement. AF has invested over the last three years in a robust leadership pathway that provides clear career opportunities for those invested in school leadership – and we are now excited to do the same for master teachers. We want to make sure that our excellent teachers who decide to stay in the classroom are still able to “progress” in their careers and have opportunities and recognition commensurate with their increasing effectiveness.

The Teacher Career Pathway increases student achievement by helping to set clear standards and raise the bar for instructional excellence across the network; retaining talented teachers through recognition and reward; and reinforcing the value AF places on great teaching by investing in the coaching and development of all of our teachers.

Following two years of design and pilot, the Teacher Career Pathway will officially begin in 2011-12 with all teachers participating in an evaluation that focuses on 1) student achievement, 2) student character, 3) quality instruction and 4) core values and contributions to the team. Developed with teachers, this comprehensive evaluation values the complexity of teaching and is measured by frequent lesson observations, student surveys, parent surveys, peer surveys, principal/dean surveys and student growth measures. Based on the 2011-12 results, teachers will enter a career stage in Fall 2012. Teachers who move up a stage may receive a commensurate salary increase and access to additional professional development opportunities.

The Teacher Career Pathway has quickly become a national model for how to identify and reward excellent teachers. Highlighted by the U.S. Department of Education, the Aspen Institute, The New Teacher Project and districts across the country, Achievement First and AF Bridgeport Academy are trailblazers in a national effort to elevate the teaching profession.

MISSION

“...to strengthen the academic and character skills needed for all students to excel in the top tier of high schools and colleges, to achieve success in a competitive world, and to serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities.”

School Name:	Achievement First Hartford	
Contact Person:	Elementary School Claire Shin, Principal 305 Greenfield Street Hartford, CT 06112 Phone: 860-695-5280 Fax: 860-242-6457 Grades: K-4	Middle School Jeff House, Principal 305 Greenfield Street Hartford, CT 06112 Phone: 860-695-5281 Fax: 860-242-6457 Grades: 5-8

BEST PRACTICES

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School Name:	Amistad Academy		
Contact Person:	Elementary School Amanda Alonzy, Principal 130 Edgewood Avenue New Haven, CT 06511 Telephone: 203-772-7000 Grades: Kindergarten - 2	Middle School Sarah White, Principal 130 Edgewood Avenue New Haven, CT 06511 Telephone: 203-772-7000 Grades: 5-8	High School Jeff Sudmyer, Director 49 Prince Street New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-1784 Grades: 9-11

BEST PRACTICES

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School Name:	The Bridge Academy
Contact Person:	Timothy Dutton, Director The Bridge Academy 401 Kossuth Street Bridgeport, CT 06608 Telephone: 203-336-9999 Grades: 7-12

BEST PRACTICES

The Bridge Academy believes that there are a number of policies that we believe other districts should consider duplicating. Listed below are quick summaries of these unique practices.

SRBI Period - The high school has instituted a half-hour period every day to pull students for Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) period. This allows us the chance to work with small groups to re-teach measured student learning deficits. We believe we are the only high school in the state that has a dedicated time for daily SRBI.

“Must Pass Policy” -- The Bridge Academy requires every student to pass every subject in order to be promoted to the next grade. If they fail the class, they must make it up in summer school. We instituted this policy because we believe most of our failures occur from a lack of student effort. If students know they must pass a class, then they work harder.

Reading program -- Students are required to read throughout the school year. When a student finishes a book of their choosing from our library, they test on the book using the Accelerated Reader computer program. If they pass the book, they earn a certain number of points depending on its length. Each student has a certain number of points they must earn during the year. If they do not reach their point’s goal, they must attend summer school! This program has drastically increased the number of students reading. Our student body of 178 passed over 2000 book tests last school year!

Math Final Exam -- Students who fail their final exam must attend summer school until they master the objectives that were taught. We have found that this has increased student achievement in math.

College Planning Program -- All seniors at The Bridge Academy are required to take a class that prepares the paperwork necessary to attend college. This includes the successful completion of SAT tests, college applications, financial aid applications and enrollment applications. This class is required for graduation, and ensures that all Bridge Academy seniors graduate with a college acceptance.

Senior Project -- Seniors at The Bridge Academy complete an interdisciplinary paper and presentation as part of a class they all must take in order to graduate. As a culmination of the class, community members grade student presentations of their work. We believe this project is an excellent way to showcase our students work and prepare them for college level presentations.

MISSION

“... provides a college preparatory education designed to overcome the problems presently found in the inner city.”

School Name:	Common Ground High School
Contact Person:	Oliver Barton, Director Common Ground High School New Haven Ecology Project 358 Springside Avenue New Haven, CT 06515 Telephone: 203-389-0823 Grades: 9-12

BEST PRACTICES

Common Ground is committed to fostering the academic achievement of all students. During 2010-11, the school engaged in several curricular and instructional practices to boost student achievement on the state mastery test. Key curriculum and instructional practices utilized during 2010-11 included:

Active, Authentic Learning Rooted In State Standards.

At Common Ground, we are convinced that a mix of no excuses, standards-based reform and opportunities for active, authentic environmental learning is a potent recipe for success among urban young people. Our teachers begin with state education standards, identifying the concepts and skills that we know every student must master. Every lesson, in every unit, in every course is built around these standards and research-based effective teaching strategies. We are relentless.

Students master these standards and skills by tackling big questions, doing real work, and performing for public audiences. In Drama, they work with professional actors to explore the role of the natural world in Shakespeare's plays -- and take to an outdoor stage, in a Shakespeare garden designed by students and community members. In Biodiversity, they work with a Yale scientist to measure species diversity in farm, forest, and city -- and share their findings through an outdoor museum exhibit. A steady focus on social and environmental justice issues is a crucial element of this inquiry-based learning, given our urban setting and diverse student body have conducted research on urban air quality and shared the results on public access television. They complete senior projects combining service-learning and research on a social justice issue.

Both the core academic curriculum and unique environmental courses (e.g., Environmental Justice, Environmental Research, Green Architecture, and Food & the Environment) incorporate projects and performances like these. We have built a school that supports inquiry-based learning: with a long school day, team-taught block courses, easy access by foot and public transit to the city and nature, active data teams to push student performance, and weekly joint planning time, for instance.

All these learning opportunities build on lasting community partnerships. Because of these partnerships, we are able to offer our students both small school support and big school opportunities. We work with three local universities to bring 50 plus mentors and ten plus professors to campus, and to create class-to-class partnerships with university courses. We send more than 30 of our students off site to participate in paid after-school job opportunities, linked to a year-long leadership and green careers curriculum. We see the community as classroom, textbook, and teacher.

Individualized Education

Tiered interventions, differentiation, and personalization are especially critical in multi-grade classrooms as heterogeneous as ours. In 2010-11, Common Ground used a tiered intervention system to reach our most struggling students with additional supports. More than a third of our student body participated in daily after-school academic support and enrichment programs, all tied to mastery of state standards. This individualized, flexible approach – matching struggling students with just-in-time individualized and small group instruction – yields real results

A School wide Approach to Reading, Writing and Math

At Common Ground, we believe that instructional responsibilities for reading, writing and math rest with all educators and utilize several practices to foster that school-wide approach. A school wide data team meets once a month and content area data teams meet twice a month to review student work, create instructional strategies, and monitor common formative assessment results. Data team work is shared in our weekly faculty planning sessions so that data team-identified areas of focus are known to all staff. School wide writing and presentation rubrics are used to assess all student writing and projects. Students must complete weekly writing assignments in all classes, including math, and teachers share responsibility for teaching non-fiction reading comprehension.

MISSION

“...graduate students with the knowledge, skills and understanding to live healthy, powerful, and productive lives. We do so through authentic learning that develops academic excellence, ecological literacy, strong character and commitment to community.”

School Name:	Elm City College Preparatory School		
Contact Person:	Elementary School Morgan Barth, Director 240 Greene Street New Haven, CT 06511 Telephone: 203-498-0702 Grades: Kindergarten–5	Middle School Marc Michaelson, Director 794 Dixwell Avenue New Haven, CT 06511 Telephone: 203-773-0390 Grades: 6-8	High School Jeff Sudmyer, Director 49 Prince Street New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-1092 Grade: 9

BEST PRACTICES

Elm City College Preparatory Academy (Elm City) schools are more than great schools. They are part of the Achievement First network of high-performing public charter schools and Elm City schools benefit from the best practices and efficiencies created by Achievement First’s team of finance, curriculum, talent development, operations, recruitment, human capital, technology, data and external relations experts. Achievement First centralizes and coordinates professional development practices across the network, providing infrastructure and support to Elm City schools in these areas at a higher level of quality and lower cost than we would be able to on our own. The following describes the strategic use of a professional development practice at Elm City schools, and across the Achievement First network, to drive high student achievement. Building on a strong background in recruiting, training and developing excellent educators, Achievement First (AF) is now launching its Teacher Career Pathway – a groundbreaking teacher evaluation and compensation program designed to foster excellence and reduce attrition.

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MISSION

“...will strengthen the academic and character skills necessary for all students to excel in the top tier of high schools and colleges, to achieve success in a competitive world, and to serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities.”

School Name:	Explorations Charter School
Contact Person:	Gail Srebnik, Executive Director Explorations Charter School The Brian J. O'Neil Building 71 Spencer Street Winsted, CT 06098 Telephone: 860-738-9070 Grades: 10-12

BEST PRACTICES

Charter schools, especially those with good parent support, can undertake the needed educational approach that will satisfy the needs of our economy. But, more importantly, they emphasize the individualized path to lifelong learning that extends into every aspect of a student's life for many years to come. The emphasis on lifelong learning prepares the child to have a *life*, not an entitlement. I believe that Explorations does work towards this end. A major key to the success we have with students is our commitment to keeping an atmosphere that is safe and open to discussion.

Here are a few comments on this taken by me from an English class assignment on the first days of the school year. When asked how students felt about being safe in school:

“Before I came to Explorations I went to WHS and LHS. In WHS there were cops at my school. I go to Explorations now and I have not seen any cops or violence...I feel safe in this school ”

“In comparison to the two schools I came from this school has no violence. I haven't seen a fight...lots of fights went down in my other HS and I didn't feel safe. This school is kind of like a safe-haven.”

“The last high school I was at didn't feel safe at all. About one or two fights happened every day and teachers didn't do much to stop bullying or racial comments. At Explorations you aren't judged as much and there are definitely no fights. The teachers also do a lot more.”

Our teacher to pupil ratio ranges from a low of 1:4 to a high of 1:17. Most of our classes are kept to 14 or less students. By keeping class size low our staff is able to not only meet individual needs but to also foster a dialogue between generations.

We work with our special education program (teacher and tutors) to provide modifications for students in need. We are able to offer enrichment programs to gifted learners as well as helping them take advantage of the community college partnership program. We are a community that is nurturing and supportive of all learners. Our atmosphere is relaxed and students who have previously not experienced academic success are able to finally 'buy-into' a program that they feel connected to. Belonging is often a key to getting involved for teens. Our outward-bound, type, philosophy focuses on individual accomplishment while developing trust, camaraderie and team spirit. Working on challenges along with their teachers helps students form stronger bonds with them and these connections carry over into the classrooms. Our career education program brings students and businesses together where students learn firsthand that learning is a lifelong activity.

Finally, our connection to families helps us involve parents in their children's education. We require that parents, with few exceptions, attend a minimum of four parent meetings a year. The staff is given the responsibility to act as advisor to a group of students and to make contact with parents on a monthly basis on their child's progress. Many parents have started to e-mail the principal to keep on top of their children's program and this is welcomed and looked upon favorably.

MISSION

“...to provide a public school that cultivates a positive attitude toward life-long learning in an experiential, non-traditional educational setting. EXPLORATIONS Charter School provides an environment that models interdependence as the foundation of society. The program emphasizes activities which foster the acceptance of responsibility, development of positive decision making and problem solving skills; and encourages students to develop a healthy attitude toward their school, community, work, family, and most importantly, toward themselves. Family and community involvement at EXPLORATIONS Charter School demonstrates how each of us takes ownership in contributing to a better future for each other.”

School Name:	Highville Charter School
Contact Person:	William D. Troy, Director Highville Charter School 130 Leederhill Drive Hamden, CT 06517 Telephone: 203-287-0528 Grades: PK-7

BEST PRACTICES

Highville continues to develop teaching and learning practices that are aimed at improving student performance.

- A. Use by all students a graphic organizer to improve organization and student focus.
- B. Continued professional development in the area of differentiated instruction.
- C. Creating opportunities for students to correlate real life situation and problem solving skills with classroom instruction.
- D. Use of the new Blooms Taxonomy as early as kindergarten to encourage higher order skills.
- E. Ongoing emphasis on writing through the “Empowering Writers” model.
- F. Use of in-school intervention to replace out of school suspension to assist in changing student behavior and allow for ongoing instruction.
- G. Established local partnerships with Whitney Center and Camp Antrum.
- H. Use of DRP for grades 1-6 to ensure continued growth especially in areas of non-fiction reading.

MISSION

“... an enterprising and caring community with strong parent and community involvement, prepares and instills a desire for all learners to confidently use technology, think globally, develop globally conscious citizenship, utilize world languages and the study of various world cultures as the basis for launching learners on their voyage as responsible navigators, to discover their potential and chart their course through an ever-changing, interdependent and global future.”

School Name:	Integrated Day Charter School
Contact Person:	Anna James, Director Integrated Day Charter School 68 Thermos Avenue Norwich, CT 06360 Telephone: 860-892-1900 Grades: Pre-kindergarten - 8

BEST PRACTICES

Literacy Intervention Using a Push-in Model

The Literacy Intervention Push-in Model was expanded to increase reading achievement in kindergarten through sixth grade. The intent is to provide increased academic reading support to struggling readers. By utilizing this model, we decreased the amount of instructional time missed when a child is pulled out of class for academic support. We were able to provide targeted reading instruction aligned with classroom instruction. Last year was a transition year without the support of Reading First. For a five year period, we utilized Reading First progress monitoring assessments and tracked the data through the assigned data base.

During our transition year, we recognized the need for maintaining a tracking system for all Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in grades kindergarten through four. Literacy tutors addressed this issue by creating student profile folders to track student progress. During 2010-11, we expanded our team to include Special Educators.

We began implementing the practice in 2008 within two model classrooms. We increased this practice last year through scheduling peer observations and follow- up coaching on this practice. Teacher and peer coaching facilitate the implementation of this practice within one’s own classroom. The planning that was performed prior to implementation was scheduling and holding data team meetings. During data team meetings, student data was analyzed and groups were created according to academic focus. To sustain this practice the literacy tutors acted as coaches for grade level teachers. Through coaching both peer observations and data driven decision making were employed. Throughout the year regular data meetings were scheduled with individual teachers and grade level teams to best monitor and modify student objectives. At the beginning of the school year, literacy tutors gathered student reading assessments to analyze and create student profiles.

The practice was successful because teachers and literacy tutors were able to provide targeted reading instruction to struggling readers. Through cross grouping teachers were able to have fewer instructional reading groups, thus allowing more time per group within the classroom setting. We were able to assess the level of success through teacher feedback and participation in data team meetings. The findings include increased cross grouping among grade levels, desire for continued data meetings and increased collaboration among teachers and tutors. The improvements made to the push-in intervention model were many. The improvements included 100 percent participation on behalf of the teachers, increased cross grouping among grade levels, collaboration among literacy tutors, paraprofessionals and special education teachers. The changes occurred because the number of students needing intervention stayed constant whereas the literacy support staff was reduced due to budget constraints. During Reading First we employed two literacy facilitators and three tutors whereas this year we are only able to employ two part-time literacy tutors. The decrease in staff caused us to look at how to best utilize special education teachers, paraprofessionals and interns during intervention blocks.

The improvements we envision for the future are continued analysis of data, scheduling intervention blocks as a K-6 team prior to the start of the school year, increased cross grouping, allotted times for paraprofessional and teacher support, and more consistent use of progress monitoring.

Production Companies

Production Companies are multifaceted groups of students and facilitators who have come together according to strengths and interests to explore over a period of time a topic of interest. The exploration of a topic is student directed but the facilitator incorporates Dr. Howard Gardner’s philosophy of Multiple Intelligences into the Production Company planning. While investigating a subject and its methodology, the group creates an application of their new understanding in the form of a product or service for an authentic audience within or beyond the school community.

Production Companies directly align with our school mission and philosophy of education “that to be actively involved a student must have input into both the content of learning as well as the process by which learning is acquired.” Production Companies are interest based, student determined, incorporating real world learning experiences in which students apply advanced content to develop applications for the real world within or beyond the school community.

Production Companies foster the development of higher order thinking skills through posing questions, analyzing, seeking knowledge and insight, and synthesizing these new understandings to apply solutions to an authentic situation or problem.

Integrated Day (cont.)

Research and curriculum integration, which are fostered in Production Companies, are two additional major tenets which are integral to IDCS philosophy. Following determination of a direction for exploration, Production Company members, with the aid of a Facilitator, establish key questions they wish to pursue, gather resources and material, conduct experiments, and invite practicing professionals to speak to the group. Curriculum integration fosters new understandings and insights are gained using the methodologies unique to various disciplines such as mathematics, language arts, science, art, social studies, physical education, media or music. Integration of curriculum in a Production Company is fundamental to the encouragement of intellectual curiosity and problem solving as well as applying this new understanding to the creation of a final product or service for an intended audience.

MISSION

“... to provide a flexible and academically challenging atmosphere, which allows for the individual difference of the learners. Parents, students and instructors will work together to establish a developmentally appropriate program for each student. Character development and direct instruction in a social curriculum are an integral part of the program. A commitment to and involvement in the school community, as well as the larger Norwich community, are fostered.”

School Name: Interdistrict School for the Arts and Communication

Contact Person: Dr. Lloyd Johnson, Executive Director
Interdistrict School for the Arts and Communication
190 Governor Winthrop Blvd.
New London, CT 06360
Telephone: 860-447-1003
Grades: 6-8

BEST PRACTICES

The focus of all professional development activities at ISAAC is to assist in the implementation of ISAAC’s School Improvement Plan. We are challenged by a large number of our students entering ISAAC not able to perform at the Proficient or Mastery level in reading, writing and/or mathematics. As a NCLB School In Need of Improvement, we have been able to use grant funds to seek the assistance of LEARN in planning and implementing our School Improvement Plan and its related Professional Development activities.

Our Teacher Supervision Plan requires certified staff to develop two Professional Goals each year. For the past three years the staff has chosen to develop collaborative goals that assist in the implementing of ISAAC’s School Improvement Plan. These commitments to common approaches to systematic improvement speaks well of the staff and its dedication to working together to improve the school.

We began Peer Observations as a way for staff to share with each other how they use the strategies taught and learned over time. Three professional development half days were teacher showcases of Effective Teaching Strategies. The Peer Observation program is planned to continue in 2011-12 assisted by the designation of a substitute teacher to relieve staff to be able to sit in on colleague’s classes.

Another major component of ISAAC’s commitment to continuous improvement is the scheduling of subject area meetings on a weekly basis between the core subject teachers and Leadership Team members. The Director of Academics facilitated the meetings. During these meetings curriculum maps and related curriculum issues are discussed and developed; Common Formative Assessment data are shared and analyzed; and instructional practices and materials are discussed and reviewed. Student data is the central issue in these meetings as well as planning intervention programs for individuals and groups of students with similar needs. The Data Teams may meet at three different times in our schedule: during a weekly team meeting while their students are at Unified Arts, during half day PD days scheduled eight times at year (10 times in 2010-11) or during a monthly Faculty Meeting time.

During 2010-2011, our Professional Development began before the contract year with two days of planning for the new school year. The purpose of the planning sessions was to plan topics and activities for the follow up professional development days scheduled throughout the year. Topics included Data Team time, Making Standards Work, development of Common Formative Assessments, and refreshers on Effective Teaching Strategies and CRISS.

In the 2009-10, it was decided by the Leadership Team that it was time for the ISAAC staff to reflect on its Mission Statement, current clientele and develop a Vision Statement. Staff, parents and board members were asked to respond to the question: “What should an education at ISAAC do for our students?” This process was facilitated by the members of the Leadership

Team and received well by the staff. After a focused brainstorming session on the vision question, an Ad Hoc volunteer committee developed a draft vision statement that was presented to and revised by the staff. The next step in the process was for the Ad Hoc committee to research and write related statements describe how the staff will accomplish the Vision of the school. The committee agreed upon and submitted to the staff revised statements taken from recent research on effective middle schools. Follow up discussions by the staff resulted in the formation of three action planning committees devoted to development of improvement plans for ISAAC. The result of this process follows:

ISAAC Vision Statement

ISAAC is a learning community dedicated to empowering a diverse population of students to become both independent and interdependent citizens of the 21st century who can successfully create an extraordinary future of their own design, by providing an educational environment in which:

1. We teach a culturally responsive curriculum grounded in rigorous standards for what students should know and be able to do. It is relevant to the concerns of adolescents and engages students in stimulating, challenging learning that leads students toward developing critical reasoning and leadership skills. It is rich in visual, music, and the performing arts. Every teacher, parent, and student is clear on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students are expected to acquire in each class, grade level and unit of instruction;
2. We plan collaboratively to develop instruction and assessment methods that address student-learning differences and a deep commitment to student achievement. The learning of each student is monitored on a timely basis. When students experience difficulty, ISAAC has structures in place to ensure they receive additional time and support for learning;
3. We prepare all students to meet the challenges of the 21st century through research-based teaching methods that require students learn to locate, analyze, interpret, and communicate information in a variety of media and formats and to solve problems creatively and logically. These methods are used with fidelity throughout the school. ISAAC believes that all students should be challenged to achieve and staff members should communicate their high expectations to students, parents, and one another;
4. We organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose. The underlying structure of small teams of teachers and students ensures high standards for both teaching and learning. We recognize team size, composition, time for planning, and continuity are all critical elements affecting team success and ultimately student achievement;
5. We govern democratically. Structures such as interdisciplinary teams, Leadership Team, action research committees, the Parent Action Team and the Board of Directors ensure widely dispersed leadership, consistent communication, and equitable decision-making. All decisions focus relentlessly on attaining the goal of success for every student and are based on data drawn from various sources;
6. We hire and nurture educators who are expert at teaching young adolescents. We engage faculty in on-going, targeted Professional Development driven by results, based on standards, and embedded in our daily work to yield improvements in student learning;
7. We provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens. We believe healthy lifestyles and academic success are tightly interwoven. We support, in partnership with the community, physical and mental health and fitness by providing a safe, caring, and healthy environment. Crew time, the CREW value system, the annual Outdoor Expeditions, and the Student Support Center all serve to instill a sense of belonging, respect, and citizenship among all students;
8. We involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development. Frequent monitoring and communication of student progress toward explicit outcomes helps staff members and parents to take collective responsibility of student learning. Community-wide events such as concerts, student expositions and all-school celebrations are vital to the school culture and allow students and adults alike to recognize and celebrate their efforts, improvements, and achievements.

Resources: Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work, DuFour, DuFour and Eaker, 2008; Turning Points 2000, Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century, Jackson, Davis, 2000; "2010 Common Core of Teaching: Foundational Skills," Connecticut State Department of Education.

During 2010-2011, our Professional Development plan was to continue our work the committees formed in response to our vision work. The Vision Action Plan developed by the staff identified to two areas of need; school climate and curriculum. The School Climate Committee developed plans for improving school safety issues and worked on bullying prevention. The staff was given school climate survey at the end of the year and the data will be examined to determine next steps. The Curriculum

Committee created curriculum maps for all subjects and were involved in outside professional development on Differentiated Instruction and Co-Teaching models. In 2011-2012, the committees will continue to work on the ISAAC Vision Action Plan.

MISSION

“...dedicated to being an experiential learning community where students, families and teachers are challenged to discover and express the best in themselves and each other while valuing the diversity in our school, our community and the world.”

School Name:	Jumoke Academy	
Contact Person:	Jumoke Academy Charter School Michael M. Sharpe, Chief Executive Director 250 Blue Hills Avenue Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-527-0575 Grades: PK-5	Jumoke Academy Honors Middle School Doreen Crawford, Principal 339 Blue Hills Avenue Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-527-0575 x130 Grades: 6-8

BEST PRACTICES

Jumoke Academy Elementary School

Through the Jumoke Academy data team, school wide goals were set and then specific grade level objectives were determined based on the most current data. For the 2011-2012 school year, a strong focus was placed upon improving students’ reading achievement. Accordingly, several assessments were utilized to monitor progress and address areas of concern. The Direct Reading Assessments (DRA2) was determined to be a valid and reliable reading assessment which was implemented in all grades K-5 in connection with Blue Ribbon assessments (similar in form to the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) for reading).

Following structured pacing guides, teachers provided interdisciplinary and motivational approaches to the targeted skills and strategies. Student’s progress was monitored in intervals of 4-6 weeks, along with three benchmark assessments at the beginning, middle and end of the year. Based on the level of student mastery, flexible groups were continually revised in order for teachers to re-teach concepts that were not fully understood. Weekly data and grade level meetings afforded teachers the opportunity to meet with the language arts coordinator and principal to analyze the data and refine the groups based on demonstrated student needs. Adjustments to the curriculum were discussed and incorporated as needed. Families were involved and informed of their child’s progress through parent-teacher conferences and when applicable, through the school’s Student Team Intervention group.

Jumoke Academy Honors: Science, Math, and Research Technology (JAH-SMaRT)

Observation, student work, projects, oral and written presentations, quizzes and tests- standardized and teacher made are ways teachers evaluate, assess and monitor student’ progress throughout the school year. At monthly academic review and school wide data meetings teachers and administration analyze the data to set goals and objectives for the purpose of using data to drive instruction. The Blue Ribbon and Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) Assessments administered three times within the school year, September, January and May, to generate baseline data for planning instruction and designing intervention for students below grades level, accelerated learning for above level students. The data is also used to track trends and develop subject level pacing guides for progress monitoring.

Regular weekly and bi-weekly teacher made formative benchmark unit tests and quizzes were constructed using Blue Ribbon materials, CMT format questioning to determine students’ mastery of concepts and skills taught. Data generated from these also were used to plan remediation and academic support for students. Data inputted into the school’s data tracker allow teacher to keep an account of students’ performance for the purpose of remediation and record keeping.

At monthly academic reviews teachers met with the principal to review/assess students’ work, looking for evidence of movement towards goal identify resources, review pacing guide and plan intervention and support.

MISSION

“...to prepare children to successfully compete in the global marketplace despite the social and economic challenges they may presently face. The academy is dedicated to rigorous academic and social standards achieved by holding high expectations for all students during challenging instruction.”

School Name:	New Beginnings Family Academy
Contact Person:	Paul Whyte, Principal New Beginnings Family Academy 184 Garden Street Bridgeport, CT 06605 Telephone: 203-384-2897 Grades: K-8

BEST PRACTICES

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

At New Beginnings Family Academy (NBFA), we employ a number of practices from which other districts may benefit. These include:

- 1. Morning Meeting** – Twice-weekly morning meetings serve to reinforce the school’s culture of excellence. During this time, outstanding classroom behavior is recognized, older students serve as role models for the lower grades and discussion ensues around the school’s STRETCH principles. STRETCH is an acronym for strategic, thoughtful, respectful, empathetic, trustworthy, consistent and hard working.
- 2. School Uniforms** - Mandatory uniforms help keep students on task and increase instructional time by eliminating a significant element of distraction. We have found that uniforms create a classroom environment more conducive to learning.
- 3. Stay Focused** -.Students in Grades 6-8 participate in a monthly mentoring program called Stay Focused. Held on Saturday morning, this program assigns each student with a mentor, who addresses peer and academic issues that may distract from learning.
- 4. Community Service** -.NBFA emphasizes civic responsibility and service to others. Two clubs in particular, Confident Young Women (CYW) and Positive Young Brothers (PYB) participate in food drives, fundraisers and community clean-ups to improve the lives of others in the greater Bridgeport area.
- 5. Data Driven Decision Making** - NBFA uses interim assessments to plan instruction, enhancement and intervention to meet the unique academic needs of every student.

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

- 1. A Longer School Day** - NBFA opens its doors each morning at 7:45a.m. Classroom instruction begins at 8 a.m. and continues until 3:45 p.m., providing students with 7.75 hours of instruction each day, compared to the 6.75 hours at traditional district schools.
- 2. STRETCH Academy-After School Program** - NBFA offers an After School Program from 3:45 - 6:15 p.m., providing 2.5 hours of additional instruction time five days a week for the students who need it the most.
- 3. An Extended Year Academy** - NBFA’s academic calendar includes 14 extra days of instruction during the month of August. This additional classroom time has proven invaluable in reducing the effects of the summer regression many students experience.
- 4. A Guided Study Program** - The Guided Study Program provides remediation and enrichment services to struggling students in mathematics, reading and writing.
- 5. Target Time** - Daily targeted intervention for struggling, average and high-achieving learners in Grades 3-8 in math, language arts and science.
- 6. CMT Academy** - NBFA remains open during February winter break. Students are invited and/or opt in to participate in small groups for targeted review and test-taking strategies. This practice helps boost students’ confidence and alleviate them of test-taking anxiety. During 2012, 65 percent of students who participated in CMT Academy improved their test scores by at least one performance level.
- 7. Flexible Grouping**.- NBFA students are grouped based on their academic ability and needs rather than age, grade or a particular class assignment. These practices augment the rigors of NBFA’s academic curriculum, while cultivating an atmosphere of cohesion and cooperative interdependence among students of all grade levels. Together, these best practices enrich the quality of education provided to New Beginnings students and positively impact the environment in which they learn,

New Beginnings Family Academy (cont.)

improving the lives of others in the greater Bridgeport area.

MISSION

“...provides each student with a superior education that creates high academic achievement and the intellectual foundation to make sound, ethical judgments in an environment of innovation and cooperation among the whole school community.”

School Name: **Odyssey Community School**

Elaine Stancliffe, Executive Director
Odyssey Community School
579 West Middle Turnpike
Manchester, CT 06040
Telephone: 860-645-1234
Grades: 4-8

Contact Person:

BEST PRACTICES

Best Practice: Targeted Remediation

Odyssey has been practicing targeted remediation for years; under the umbrella of Connecticut’s interpretation of Response to Intervention we use Scientific Research-Based Interventions to address academic weaknesses in individual students. Our goal is simple—to employ instructional interventions both in and out of the classroom to help students who struggle in specific academic areas to increase their level of skill and ability in these areas. By strengthening individual students’ skills and abilities, we subsequently see an overall improvement in school-wide CMT scores.

In 2010 – 2011 we fully implemented the SRBI model using our Student Assistance Team as the vehicle. We devoted additional resources through our operating budget as well as our Title 1 grant to this program. We have funded two part-time certified Language Arts teachers to provide additional support at the Tier 1 and Tier 2 level, and we have funded a part-time RTI specialist to coordinate the delivery and assessment of interventions. Odyssey uses the strategies of either remediation or Tier 1, 2, or 3 interventions (SRBI) based on the needs of each student.

Under the guidance of our Special Education Lead Teacher, classroom teachers analyze data from each previous year to determine each student’s need for remediation at the beginning of each school year. Teachers meet in Data Teams to analyze CMT scores, Blue Ribbon scores, previous school year report cards, reading and math placement test scores and previous teacher recommendations. Students are identified for remediation if there are content strands on the CMT or Blue Ribbon which they have not mastered. Students are identified for SRBI on the basis of low CMT or Blue Ribbon scores, previous school year report cards, reading and math placement test scores and previous teacher recommendations.

Remediation is specifically targeted to CMT content strands that have not been mastered by students. Remediation takes place in small groups during the school day, during students’ study hall periods, and is delivered and monitored by classroom teachers.

Tier 1 interventions take place within each general education classroom, and are delivered and monitored by the classroom teacher under the guidance of the Special Education Lead Teacher. Progress monitoring takes place frequently, with a decision at the end of 8 – 10 weeks as to the efficacy of the interventions, and whether more intensive interventions are indicated. Generally, progress monitoring takes the form of customized Blue Ribbon tests, which are CMT-like assessments that can be customized to assess only the specific strands that are being worked on.

Tier 2 interventions take place in smaller groups (3 – 4 students) outside of the school day, generally after school, and are delivered by certified staff members under the guidance of the Special Education Lead Teacher. Progress monitoring takes place frequently, with a decision at the end of 8 – 10 weeks as to the efficacy of the interventions, and whether more intensive interventions are indicated. Again, progress monitoring generally takes the form of customized Blue Ribbon tests.

Students in Tier 3 of SRBI receive more intensive interventions which are delivered to one or two students at a time, rather than in a small group.

Parents are informed by letter when their children are identified for either remediation or SRBI interventions. We found this program of targeted remediation to be successful in large part because we devoted monetary and personnel resources to deliver the remediation and/or SRBI and to progress-monitor over time.

Odyssey School (cont.)

In 2011 – 2012 we intend to continue funding our RTI specialist to administer our SRBI program; we will retain our current staff who deliver instruction and assessment, and we will also fund a full-time Literacy Specialist to work with classroom teachers and to deliver direct instruction in literacy skills to ensure that all Odyssey students are reading on grade level by the end of Third Grade.

1. Professional Development: Ongoing professional development which is aligned with the school’s common focus and high expectations to improve the performance of all students is critical in high-performing schools. These professional development offerings are focused and informed by research and school/classroom based assessments. Appropriate instructional support and resources are provided to implement approaches and techniques learned through professional development.

Indicators

These research based indicators represent qualities found in successful schools.

- Professional development addresses student learning needs as well as program needs identified through a variety of means (assessment, data, mandates, and curriculum changes).
- Professional development is planned, ongoing and systemic.
- Professional development which addresses school and district goals is a collaborative process involving all stakeholders.
- Professional development supports the development of collaborative learning communities by providing time for staff to meet, share, reflect, and modify instructional practice.
- Modifications are made as needed in assessment methods and procedures to address special needs of students.
- Professional development results in improved student performance.
- Professional development outcomes are implemented with appropriate support and resources.

Professional development programs are monitored and evaluated through data gathering and analysis.

MISSION

“...provides a positive intermediate elementary and middle school experience that emphasizes academic excellence, the ability to communicate effectively using traditional and technological media and the development of strong character and self-confidence. The unique mind and heart of each child is nurtured as students are taught to internalize the CIRCLE values (Courage, Integrity, Respect, Curiosity, Leadership and Excellence) and to become productive members of their community.”

School Name:	Park City Prep Charter School
Contact Person:	Bruce Ravage, Executive Director Park City Prep Charter School 510 Barnum Avenue, 2 nd floor Bridgeport, CT 06608 Telephone: 203-953-3766 Grades: 6-8

BEST PRACTICES

Curriculum and Instruction

We have spent the past 16 months developing a new, comprehensive language arts curriculum, aligned with the Common Core Standards, the Grade Level Expectations and the strands of Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMT’s). In the past year, we have completed most of the new math curriculum, as well. In the coming year, math will be completed and science curriculum development will be well underway, as well.

The curriculum being implemented this year employs research-based teaching practices, guided and supported by ongoing, weekly professional development. Common Formative Assessments are administered to monitor students’ progress and inform instructional practices. Teachers are receiving training in data team facilitation in order to evaluate student performance most effectively.

Indicators of Best Practices

- In collaboration with Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.), our new language arts curriculum was completed and language arts teachers received ongoing training in best literacy practices throughout the year.
- Teachers were trained by the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) in the area of Data Team Facilitation.

This training will continue in the 2011-12 school year.

- Students had 120 minutes a day of instruction in language arts and 90 minutes in math. In addition, social studies and science teachers devoted at least one period per week on strategies and skills in reading in the content areas.
- Our Independent Reading and Accelerated Math programs have enabled us to customize instruction and learning to meet students' individual needs.
- Based upon our Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) grant, we have expanded the use of technology across the curriculum in Language Arts, Social Studies and Science.
- All books, hardware, software and other instructional supplies and materials have been provided to ensure that teachers could implement instruction effectively.
- We worked with the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (C.A.B.E.) to revise or write comprehensive policies.
- Lead Teachers continued to mentor and support their colleagues in language arts and math to ensure that best practices were being employed uniformly and effectively.

MISSION

"...promote academic excellence and foster interest and competence in math, science and technology and raise the level of performance of middle school students from communities historically under-represented in the fields of science, technology and math."

School Name:	Side by Side Community School
Contact Person:	Matthew Nittoly, Director Side by Side Community School 10 Chestnut Street South Norwalk, CT 06854 Telephone: 203-857-0306 Grades: PK-8

BEST PRACTICES

Much of the emphasis on instruction and assessment at Side by Side has recently evolved based on the teachings and trainings of the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI). Thus, it can be said that the ‘Best Practices’ of teaching at Side by Side in 2010-11 were based on this approach.

CT Accountability for Learning Initiative at Side by Side Community School: In response to our most recent Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Charter Renewal proceedings, our student CMT scores, as well as to previously self-identified areas in need of improvement, Side by Side Community School’s preliminary School Improvement Team was formed in June 2007 in an effort to distinguish areas in need of further development and expansion in relation to curriculum, assessment, and instruction. Since forming, the team broke down the areas in need of improvement into three categories: data collection and analysis, assessment and evaluation of student progress, and curriculum/standard alignment. In 2007-08, our first efforts were focused on providing the professional development, collaborative time, and administrative support and guidance required to address these three focus areas. In 2008-09, we began applying the knowledge gained from this professional development and implementing new models for curriculum, assessment and instruction. Additionally, all teachers were trained in by CES in the Data Team and Data Driven Decision Making module. In 2009-10, with further support from our CES consultant, these systems were further enhanced with a focus on data analysis and professional collaboration. In 2010-11, our relationship with the CALI model continued as we worked on expanding our data sources with our CALI consultant in order to create systems that will help us begin collecting and analyzing school wide data that would help us better understand the strengths and weaknesses in our school climate. These initial sessions marked the launch of our exploration of positive behavioral support systems, which will be the focus of our school for the upcoming 2011-12 school year.

In the area of interventions the Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System continues to be implemented for all children reading below grade level in grades K-4. This system was chosen based upon several specific criteria as well. First, it places students on a gradient which aligns with our current 100 Book Challenge, a program that over the last five years has served to successfully motivate reluctant readers. Second it contains a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) comparable component as required by the Connecticut Department of Education for all reading programs. Progress is measurable, and the interventions are scientifically research based. Last, it is an efficient way to collect data, as it provides recording forms, checklists, and other data-management resources. This system significantly informs the data team process.

During the 2010-11 school year, Side By Side also continued using Lexia software as a scientifically research based reading intervention. Created by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Lexia Reading teaches students to learn skills in sequence, logically building an understanding, while gaining competency and preparing for the next skill. Computerized diagnostic assessments screen for at-risk students, providing valuable data to the data team process. All students reading below grade level in grades 1-8 receive Lexia Reading interventions. This program also has a school/home component, and many students utilize this intervention over the summer, providing an opportunity for yearlong data collection.

Assessment and intervention were only one part of the curriculum and instruction work that has been occurring here at Side By Side. This school year, the SBS Curriculum Coordinator continued to be an active member in Connecticut’s larger assessment community, and with support from the CALI, Lead and Learn, and the Connecticut Assessment Forum, our Response to Intervention model was adapted to facilitate better collaboration with the home districts who provide services to our students. This process has involved:

- a) The continued implementation of formative assessments to be administered minimally three times a year beginning Fall 2009 in an effort to consistently obtain current, accurate data to inform instruction and identify the need for interventions, coupled with interim strand assessments which were introduced during the 2010-11 school year
- b) Structured, collaborative analysis of collected data, particularly of student work and formative assessment results.
- c) The review of rubrics and other assessment and evaluation tools in regards to their efficacy and accuracy of measuring student progress
- d) Holding pre-referral meetings to share data and determine next steps for at-risk students
- e) Making referrals to the Title I and ELL interventions, and deciding upon appropriate and effective interventions

Side by Side (cont.)

This work is ongoing. Inherent in this process is the belief that the Data Driven Decision Making process should be teacher driven, and thus the school improvement team should allow the restructuring of the assessment and evaluation process at Side By Side to be guided by their teaching styles and philosophies. These efforts are to enhance and expand upon curriculum and instruction, not to alter the basic philosophies underlying the teaching and learning process. This plan intrinsically will focus on considering how to organize and design classroom process and products to show evidence of learning.

In addition to the model of ‘accountability for learning’ approach that has been implemented, the following practices were employed at Side by Side School during the 2009-10 school year and were most effective at fostering high academic achievement from our students.

Literacy How/Haskins Laboratories

The 2010-11 school year marked a continuation of our professional development relationship with Margie Gillis, senior scientist from Haskins Laboratories and President of literacy How Haskins Laboratories is an international, multidisciplinary research organization that conducts and disseminates research on spoken and written language. Exchanging ideas, enhancing professional learning communities, it produces research that enhances our understanding of -- and reveals ways to improve or remediate -- speech perception and production, reading and reading disabilities, and human communication. This philosophy guided our literacy professional development throughout the year, in the form of a workshop and coaching model.

PIMMS Wesleyan

The 2010-11 school year also marked continued professional development in the area of math. The Project to Increase Mastery of Math and Science promotes a mission of improving instruction by working with teachers to strengthen their command of subject matter, learn and utilize effective teaching strategies, understand the critical importance of their expectations for high achievement by all students, and develop their leadership qualities so that they can act as agents of change at the school, district and state levels. Professional development consisted of a summer institute that Side By Side Math teachers participated in at Six to Six Magnet School. This institute enabled teachers to participate in a professional learning community with teachers who were already familiar with the new Terc math curriculum, as well as to receive professional guidance regarding curriculum implementation.

100 Book Challenge

- This practice, first adopted because teachers saw a need for books to be available for students in their homes, has continued to be successful throughout the 2010-11 school year. Wrapping up its fifth year, this challenge fosters enthusiasm and provides the resources necessary to foster early literacy skills and habits.
- In every classroom, students are able to identify the right level book for them, take it home, read for a half hour and then have a parent sign the reading log to verify the time. Ongoing professional development was provided to the staff to support them as they continue to implement this challenge.
- The most successful part of the plan continues to be parental involvement. Increased interest was taken in what the children were reading and monitoring the fact that it was happening. The most success came from the ELL students and the middle of the road students who started to make continual progress.

English language learners-

ELL students are a growing part of our school’s population. Because of this, a great emphasis is placed on ensuring that the practices of our teachers enable these students to successfully access the curriculum.

A ELL Program/Model Structure Description

In keeping with Side by Side’s mission to reflect and enhance the diversity of our community, our Title III instructional program is based on a push-in inclusion model, with an emphasis on collaboration between head teachers, assistant teachers, and the ELL push-in teacher. The goal is to provide targeted support services to our English Language Learners based upon the standards outlined in the Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks, English is the language used for instruction at all grade levels.

In kindergarten through fourth grade, students remain in one classroom with the same teachers throughout the day. Individualized goals are developed for ELLs using data from standardized assessments, including Language Assessment Scales (LAS Links) as well as qualitative observations and evaluations. Strategies are implemented to achieve these goals through one-on-one support (provided by the classroom teachers and ELL push-in teacher) and small group work, designed to meet the needs of the ELLs. For the content areas, classroom teachers work with the ELL push-in teacher to ensure that language is used in ways that make it understandable to the learner, even though English language proficiency is in progress. In other words, the ELLs receive comprehensible input.

Side by Side (cont.)

In fifth grade through eighth grade, students rotate classrooms and teachers throughout the day for different content areas. Again, individualized goals are developed for ELLs using data from standardized assessments including LAS Links as well as qualitative observations and evaluations. The ELL push-in teacher works with the content area teachers to integrate these goals in each content area classroom. Comprehensible input is emphasized.

B Description of Instructional Classroom Strategies/Practices

The major classroom practices and strategies teachers use when working with ELLs include the following:

- **Increasing Comprehensibility** - Drawing from Krashen's theory of comprehensible input, this principle involves the ways in which teachers can make content more understandable to their students. Specific strategies include providing many nonverbal clues such as pictures, objects, demonstrations, gestures, and intonation cues; building from language that is already understood; using graphic organizers; hands-on learning opportunities; and cooperative or peer tutoring techniques.
- **Increasing Interaction** - Drawing from Swain's emphasis on comprehensible output, a number of strategies have been developed that increase students' opportunities to use their language skills in direct communication and for the purpose of "negotiating meaning" in real-life situations. These include cooperative learning, study buddies, project-based learning, and one-to-one teacher/student interactions.
- **Increasing Thinking/Study Skills** - Drawing from Cummins' theories of academic language and cognitively demanding communication, these strategies suggest ways to develop more advanced, higher order thinking skills as a student's competency increases. Chamot and O'Malley (1994) developed the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) to bridge the gap between Cummins's theories and actual classroom strategies. These include asking students higher order thinking questions (e.g., what would happen if...?), modeling "thinking language" by thinking aloud, explicitly teaching and reinforcing study skills and test-taking skills, and holding high expectations for all students.

Some of the strategies used for specific content areas include the following:

- **Literacy:** "Language Experience" approach (using students' words to create a text that becomes material for a reading lesson), dialogue/interactive journals (students write in a journal, and the teacher writes back regularly, responding to questions, asking questions, making comments, or introducing new topics - the teacher does not evaluate what is written, but models correct language and provides a non-threatening opportunity for ELL students to communicate in writing with someone proficient in English, and to receive some feedback), readers' theater (formatting a story like a script so that a small group of students presents the story to the class - this strategy allows students opportunities to have repeated exposure to the same text, experience the simultaneous visual and auditory presentation of words as they follow the script, and offers an engaging way for ELLs to hear peers model fluent English)
- **Mathematics:** multimodal learning (using pictures and manipulatives to help illustrate concepts), flexible means of representation (allowing students to present their learning in flexible ways, such as drawing, using math tools instead of writing, etc.)

Social Studies & Science: anticipation guides for textbook readings (questions and activities for students to engage in before reading in order to activate prior knowledge and form a purpose for reading), targeted vocabulary development (creating picture dictionaries for new vocabulary, word maps, vocabulary games, social studies/science unit word walls), hands-on investigations/experiments

MISSION

"...to ensure that every child succeeds and every voice is heard We will engage our students in a challenging and relevant curriculum of the highest standard that will reflect and enhance their diversity and promote their unique gifts and talents We will build character and responsibility through public service and political action that will instill a sense of social justice We will support the needs of our families We will strive to perfect the art and craft of teaching and promote excellence in our profession."

School Name:	Stamford Academy
Contact Person:	Michael McGuire, Director Stamford Academy 229 North Street Stamford, CT 06092 Telephone: 203-324-6300 Grades: 9-12

BEST PRACTICES

Academic Best Practices

Staff Certification – In accordance with best practices, most teachers and administrators held current certifications in their subject area.

Teacher Meetings – Held weekly on Thursdays and Fridays, all teachers met and discussed a variety of issues. In addition, this time was dedicated to the professional development of each teacher. Topics included Socratic methods, peer coaching, mentoring, and other professional development topics as selected by the Director of Curriculum.

Supervision – Each teacher was required to meet with the Director of Curriculum and discuss pedagogical issues. Teachers were mentored by the Curriculum Director on a variety of topics including lesson plans, classroom management, and other teaching techniques. In addition, the Curriculum Director was responsible for weekly professional development updates on all teachers.

School-wide Projects – As described in this report, all students participated in school-wide projects. The students were graded cross-curricularly. The two projects this year were: Black History and Flight.

Social Best Practices

Risk Management - Once a month during our weekly staff meeting we engaged in an activity called Risk Management. This process was modeled after the meeting of medical professionals at Boston Children’s Hospital. During the hour long process, a staff member presents a difficult issue that they encountered over the past month. In a structured and facilitated way, the entire staff walks the presenting staff member through a series of questions and suggestions about how to deal with a similar event in the future.

Family Advocacy – All students were assigned a family advocate whose job it was to take the social and emotional temperature of the child each day when they arrived at school. In addition, they met with each child once per week for 30 minutes. At this meeting they constructed and reviewed the current 90-day social and emotional plan. They were also required to meet with each family once a month at their place of residence. They also had the responsibility of advocating for the child during discipline meeting and during other educational functions.

Family Centers, Inc – Based on the premise that a happy child is a productive child, all students that apply and go to Stamford Academy agree to some form of counseling. During the past year, most were involved in group sessions with topics ranging from teenage life to drug and alcohol abuse. Others required one-on-one sessions and they were seen weekly by a clinician.

Supervision – All employees receive weekly supervision. This social service model is designed to allow employees a forum for issues, give them a platform for professional development and provides an open communication stream with supervisors.

MISSION

“... to re-engage and guide students in acknowledging and developing their educational strengths while acquiring the skills to contribute positively to themselves and their community”

School Name:	Trailblazers Academy
Contact Person:	Craig Baker, Director Trailblazers Academy P.O Box 359 Stamford, CT 06904 Telephone: 203-977-5690 Grades: 6-8

BEST PRACTICES

Formative Assessments and Data Teams

Like many schools across Connecticut, Trailblazers Academy will continue to follow the state-wide initiative to improve student performance by developing clear, essential standards and better aligning classroom assessments to those standards. Students continue to enter sixth grade at Trailblazers Academy two to five grade levels below in reading and math. By creating clear objectives, designing pre/post formative assessments, and collecting data, we will be able to better pinpoint effective instructional methods and identify students who are not making achievement gains.

This process was started in the 2004-05 school year with staff members attending trainings in Making Standards Work and Data-Driven Decision Making and continued through the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years as staff was trained in Formative Assessments, Data Teams, and Data-Driven Decision Making. In 2010-11, staff was trained in rubrics and looking at student work. In the 2010-11 school year, teachers met weekly for data team meetings to analyze discrete data on student achievement on specific grade-level expectations. Data teams met weekly for 60 minutes, with rotating content areas so that each content area was addressed every four weeks (math, science, English and social studies), allowing the weeks in between content focus to change instruction and target students not making gains and also formatively assess the students again and analyze the data from the assessments,

Weekly Curricular Supervision Meetings

Based on the social work model of having weekly clinical supervision meetings, our Director of Curriculum meets with each teacher for a minimum of 30 minutes per week. During this time the Director of Curriculum is able to ask questions about lesson plans, choices of modes of instruction and needed support. This time is also an opportunity for the teacher to bounce ideas off a master teacher and converse about both struggles and successes in the classroom. Coupled with classroom observations, this is a professional development tool that is meaningful and consistent throughout the year.

Classroom Observations

During the 2009-10 school year, the Director of Curriculum performed four clinical classroom observations per teacher throughout the year. Teachers were required to complete pre- and post-observation self-assessments in order to determine thoughts and feelings that have an impact on pedagogical practices. The Director of Curriculum used an observation framework based on the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching with research-proven indicators that were standardized for the school based on the needs of the students. Teachers met with the Director of Curriculum following each observation to debrief the experience and were required to implement instructional improvements based on observed data. Teachers were also encouraged to observe their colleagues during release time to understand pedagogical practices in other content areas and grade levels.

Readers Workshop

In the summer of 2009, the Director of Curriculum and four teachers attended a summer institute at Columbia University's Teacher's College on the Readers Workshop. These individuals brought the model back to the school and implemented it in the school's English classes with great success. The model also was used to further build a culture of literacy in the school. The Director of Curriculum continued to provide professional development in this model to the teachers throughout the year. In the summer of 2011, four additional teachers attended a week-long training in Readers Workshop at Columbia University's Teachers College. The school implemented this model in its social studies classes in the 2010-11 school years, and will implement in its science and math classes in the following school years.

MISSION

"...to hold all students to high academic expectations While maintaining small classes and fostering positive relationships, the school builds a strong academic foundation for each student by emphasizing core subjects, basic skills and character development."