

VII.B.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

To Be Proposed:
April 5, 2023

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Achievement First Hartford Academy from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2026, subject to the Commissioner's April 5, 2023, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of _____, this fifth day of April, Two Thousand Twenty-Three.

Signed: _____
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary
State Board of Education

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education

DATE: April 5, 2023

SUBJECT: Renewal of State Charter – Achievement First Hartford Academy, Hartford

Executive Summary

Introduction

In accordance with subsection (g) of Section (§)10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), charters may be renewed, upon application, in accordance with the provisions for the granting of new charters. The State Board of Education (SBE) may renew a charter for a period of up to five years. The SBE makes renewal decisions based on evidence of the following performance standards:

1. *School Performance:* Is the school a successful model resulting in strong student outcomes and a positive school climate?
2. *Stewardship, Governance, and Management:* Is the school financially and organizationally healthy and viable?
3. *Student Population:* Is the school promoting equity by effectively attracting, enrolling, and retaining students, particularly among targeted populations?
4. *Legal Compliance:* Is the school acting in compliance with applicable laws and regulations?

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the SBE carefully evaluate qualitative and quantitative evidence and longitudinal data aligned to the four performance standards outlined above when making charter renewal decisions. The charter performance framework drives the CSDE’s charter school accountability systems and processes, including initial approval decisions, annual monitoring, and renewal determinations. From inception to renewal, charter schools must abide by the CSDE’s charter school accountability procedures and performance framework. Charter monitoring takes place through annual reporting, meetings, correspondence, data submissions, and site visits, as appropriate. In accordance with C.G.S. §10-66bb(g), a charter may be renewed upon application if the charter school has demonstrated satisfactory performance relative to the four performance standards.

History/Background

Achievement First Hartford Academy (AFHA) opened in the fall of 2008. The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2022-23 reports 1,041 students in Grades K-12 with 100 percent residing in Hartford (the host district). AFHA has the maximum approved student enrollment of 1,125 seats. Table 1 on page 16 of the attached Charter Renewal Report provides the latest available audited 2022-23 student enrollment and demographic data. Forty-seven percent of AFHA students qualify for free or reduced-price meals and 10.0 percent of the students receive special education services. The mission of AFHA is to “prepare our students to deepen their knowledge of self and community, to excel at college, career, and life, and to lead lives of purpose and leadership.”

On May 1, 2019, AFHA received a three-year charter renewal. A condition stated in the 2019 renewal required AFHA to develop a corrective action plan to bring its staff into certification compliance by October 31, 2019.

On July 14, 2020, the SBE voted to extend by one year the term of AFHA and each eligible charter school to support schools in adequately addressing issues imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and to maintain a comprehensive charter renewal process.

On November 19, 2020, representatives of AFHA appeared before the Accountability and Support Committee of the SBE to discuss the school’s progress and to provide an update on the school’s status of teacher certification compliance. In addition, AFHA was required to provide the CSDE Turnaround Office with updates on the status of teacher certification of staff at the school.

Charter Renewal Process

Application for Renewal of Charter: The CSDE accepted an application for the renewal of AFHA’s charter on September 9, 2022. The application detailed the charter school’s progress, operations, and achievement in relation to the CSDE’s charter school performance standards: (a) school performance; (b) stewardship, governance, and management; (c) student population; and (d) legal compliance. AFHA submitted data and evidence to substantiate the charter school’s written responses.

A renewal team comprised of the CSDE staff with expertise in curriculum, assessments, special education, multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs), school management, finance, and school governance reviewed the renewal application and requested clarification and additional information where necessary.

Renewal Site Visit: On November 30, 2022, the CSDE renewal team conducted an onsite visit at AFHA. The purpose of the onsite visit was to observe AFHA programs, policies, practices, and procedures to assess their efficacy and fidelity to the school’s charter and aligned operating systems. Evidence was collected through the onsite visit observations, document reviews, interviews, and focus groups. The team spoke with board members, administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members. The team used this process to ensure that the school is functioning in compliance with the law and the school’s mission. The team verified the responses detailed in the renewal application regarding compliance with the law and the CSDE’s performance framework and accountability plan.

Invitation for Written Comment: The CSDE solicited written comments on the renewal of AFHA from the Superintendent of Hartford Public Schools (HPS) and from contiguous school districts: Bloomfield, Newington, South Windsor, West Hartford, Wethersfield, and Windsor. The CSDE did not receive any responses to the solicitation.

Public Hearing: Awilda Reasco, member of the SBE, and the CSDE staff held a public hearing on January 26, 2023, in the City of Hartford, and heard from individuals on the potential charter renewal of AFHA and the impact it is having on the community. Public hearing participants included members of the AFHA community, including members of the governing board, family members, students, graduates, school staff, and community members. Over 30 people attended the public hearing. Fourteen individuals offered testimony supporting the school's efforts and the renewal of the charter. No one spoke out against the renewal of the school's charter.

Review of Documents and Site Visit Findings

The most recent available data and information contained in the Charter Renewal Report and the state student data (beginning on page 8) indicates AFHA's performance according to the four performance standards. The report highlights school strengths and areas for continued growth.

Areas of Strength Include:

- AFHA's 2021-22 Accountability Index score of 68.4 percent outperforms HPS' score of 56.8 percent by 11.6 percentage points and is within 1.3 percentage points of the state average score of 69.7 percent.
- AFHA's English language arts (ELA) Performance Index – All Students has exceeded the host district over the three reporting periods (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22) and the state in 2017-18 and 2018-19 and was within 4.1 index points of the state in 2021-22.
- AFHA's Mathematics Performance Index – All Students has exceeded the host district over the three reporting periods (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22) and the state in 2017-18 and 2018-19.
- AFHA's 2021-22 ELA Academic Growth – All Students has exceeded the host district and the state over the three reporting periods (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22), and has increased 10.2 percentage points from 60.2 percent in 2018-19 to 70.4 percent in 2021-22.
- AFHA's Mathematics Academic Growth – All Students has exceeded the host district over the three reporting periods (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22), and has increased 16.8 percentage points from 57.4 percent in 2018-19 to 74.2 percent in 2021-22.
- AFHA's ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students has exceeded the host district and the state over the three reporting periods (2017-18, 2018-19 and 2021-22).
- AFHA's Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students has exceeded the host district and the state over the three reporting periods (2017-18, 2018-19 and 2021-22).

- AFHA’s 2021-22 ELA Academic Growth – High Needs Students has exceeded the host district and the state over the three reporting periods (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22), and has increased 8.9 percentage points from 60.2 percent in 2018-19 to 69.1 percent in 2021-22.
- AFHA’s 2021-22 Mathematics Academic Growth – High Needs Students has exceeded the host district and the state over the three reporting periods (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22), and has increased 17.4 percentage points from 57.4 percent in 2018-19 to 74.8 percent in 2021-22.
- AFHA’s Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate of 96.9 percent in 2018-19 and 88.6 percent in 2017-18 exceeded the host district and state averages.
- AFHA’s Six-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate of 100.0 percent in 2018-19 and 100.0 percent in 2017-18 exceeded the host district and state averages.
- AFHA’s 2021-22 Discipline Tier based on suspensions/expulsions data was Tier 1, the highest designation achieved by districts with low suspension rates and low racial/ethnic disparities in discipline data compared to all other districts. AFHA was previously identified as Tier 4 in 2018-19.
- AFHA demonstrates strong community support as evidenced by testimony provided by individuals at the public hearing and interviews with parents and students during the site visit.
- A review of AFBA’s Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program determined it is in compliance with TEAM.
- AFHA’s website and governing board documents demonstrate that the governing board meetings are open and accessible to the public.
- No significant findings, conditions, or internal weaknesses were uncovered in AFHA’s three most recent certified financial audits.
- A review of the school’s finances found it to be financially viable.

Areas for Continued Growth Include:

- AFHA’s 2021-22 Accountability Index score of 68.4 percent has decreased 12.9 percentage points from 81.3 percent in 2017-18.
- The school’s ELA Performance Index – All Students has decreased 8.8 index points from an index of 68.9 in 2018-19 to an index of 60.1 in 2021-22.
- AFHA’s 2021-22 Mathematics Performance Index – All Students of 52.5 was 6.1 index points below the state’s 58.6 and has decreased 12.6 index points from 65.1 points in 2018-19.
- AFHA’s ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students has decreased 9.4 index points from an index of 68.5 in 2017-18 to an index of 59.1 in 2021-22.
- AFHA’s Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students has decreased 12.0 index points from an index of 63.8 in 2017-18 to an index of 51.8 in 2021-22.
- A review of AFHA’s chronic absenteeism rates of 6.5 percent in 2018-19 and 8.5 percent in 2019-20 found they are below the host district and state. In 2021-22, during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school experienced an increase of 53.2 percent, above the state average of 23.7 percent and the host district of 46.0 percent.
- Although AFHA’s suspension rates of 8.3 percent in 2018-19 and 8.1 percent in 2019-20 trended down the school experienced an increase of 3.1 percentage points to 11.2 percent in 2021-22 during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- A review of AFHA’s Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) by staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit determined the APPM lacked some of the standard sections of an APPM. The missing items include credit card statement review and establishing and maintaining assets on inventory. The school anticipates amending its APPM to include these items and present it for review and approval of the governing board at its June 1, 2023, meeting.
- The AFHA governing board and its Finance and Audit Committee have specific roles and responsibilities for oversight of school operations, including financial management, the leadership team and charter school management organization (CMO). However, their roles and responsibilities are not formally documented in a Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM) to ensure consistency and continuity. The missing items include the monthly credit card review and approval by the Board Treasurer, annual review and approval of school policy and procedures by the governing board, and a CMO evaluation in compliance with the CMO contract and site visit findings. The school indicated the BPPM is currently being revised for the next board term beginning in June 2023. The revision will formally document the roles and responsibilities of the AFHA governing board and its Finance and Audit Committee for the oversight of school operations, including financial management, the leadership team and CMO.
- A review of AFHA’s state certified staff file and employee roster determined 13 staff are not properly certified. The school is working with the CSDE staff within the Talent Office, Bureau of Certification and Educator Standards, to develop a plan to address all instances of certification non-compliance.
- A review of AFHA’s Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP) determined it is out of compliance. The EESP was submitted for the 2015-16 school year and approved by the CSDE under the conditions of a waiver from some components of the Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation, which have now expired. The school is working with the CSDE staff within the Talent Office, Bureau of Educator Effectiveness, to ensure it develops an EESP aligned to the revised *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation* (2023) and will submit the EESP to the CSDE, Talent Office, for review and approval by April 1, 2024, and implement the new EESP in accordance with the SBE adopted implementation plan for the 2024-25 school year.

Conclusion

Achievement First Hartford Academy is providing its students, families, and community with a viable public school choice option, achieving its mission, and making strides in closing Connecticut’s achievement gap. The school’s suspension rates over the first two reporting periods (2018-19 and 2019-20) have trended down. During the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school experienced an increase of 3.1 percentage points. AFHA uses a tiered behavior management system including restorative practices and strategies that teachers use when addressing student behavior. The school provides professional development for leadership and staff to align and perfect the use of the behavior system and to maintain positive relationships between staff and students. AFHA’s Tier 1 Discipline designation in 2021-22 is representative of a school that equitably implements clear and consistent behavioral policies and procedures across the students it serves. The school’s Four- and Six-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates have been higher than the host district and state averages.

The school's chronic absenteeism rates remained low in the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, below the host district and state. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021-22, the school experienced an increase above that experienced by the host district and the state. To meet student needs, school administration and staff have developed systems and supports to identify students and families with attendance issues. This work will need to continue and expand to include determining the root causes of poor attendance and to provide supports and resources to address barriers that negatively affect student attendance. AFHA's Academic Growth ELA and Mathematics – All Students and High Needs Students have increased from 2018-19 to 2021-22 and have exceeded the host district and the state averages. While AFHA's ELA Performance Index – All Students and High Needs Students Rates have exceeded the host district and state or was near the state average, both populations experienced performance decreases in 2021-22 above that experienced by the state. While AFHA's Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students Rates have exceeded the host district and the state in 2017-18 and 2021-22, AFHA's Mathematics Performance Index – All Students Rates were mixed as performance exceeded the host district over the three periods reported (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22) and the state in 2017-18 and 2018-19. In 2021-22 Mathematics Performance Index - All Students performed 6.1 index points below the state. In 2021-22 both populations experienced a decrease in mathematics performance above that experienced by the state. The school is out of compliance with teacher certification and EESP.

Charter Renewal Recommendation

Acknowledging that AFHA's academic and attendance performance indicators are not without weakness, and AFHA is also out of compliance with teacher certification, an issue it was cited for in its last charter renewal issued on May 1, 2019, the CSDE recommends that the SBE renew the school's charter for a period of three years, subject to the following conditions:

1. By May 5, 2023, AFHA shall submit a corrective action plan acceptable to the Commissioner of Education. The corrective action plan must include strategies and action steps to improve student academic achievement. Additionally, AFHA must utilize the CSDE Acceleration Cycle as a framework for developing and implementing an improvement plan to address learning acceleration, learning recovery, and student enrichment because of the pandemic. The school must convene a team to develop and monitor the implementation of a plan that intentionally addresses unfinished learning while focusing on the teaching of prioritized, essential content, and maintaining a high level of rigor for all learners. AFHA shall submit to the CSDE, on a bi-monthly basis beginning October 2023, a report monitoring its year-to-date progress of improving student academic achievement. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE's Turnaround Office. AFHA shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education's acceptance of the plan.
2. By May 5, 2023, AFHA shall submit a corrective action plan acceptable to the Commissioner of Education. The corrective action plan must target and address chronic absenteeism by: (a) isolating the root causes of chronic absenteeism; (b) identifying interventions to target root causes; and (c) monitoring interventions and applying midcourse corrections, as necessary. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE's Turnaround Office. AFHA shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education's acceptance of the plan. The CSDE will

review AFHA's year-to-date number of student chronic absenteeism on EdSight at the year-end of June 30, 2023. Additionally, the CSDE will develop with AFHA a bi-monthly review of the school's chronic absenteeism rate beginning in October 2023.

3. By May 5, 2023, AFHA shall submit a plan for the CSDE's review and approval to bring its staff into certification compliance by October 31, 2023, by: (a) ensuring staff responsible for hiring clearly understand the certification requirements of each position; (b) providing a clear pathway and support to certification with established milestones and timelines; (c) including monitoring and interventions for non-compliance; and (d) reporting of non-compliant staff including certification targets, schedules, and action steps, including responsible school staff, on August 1, 2023, to ensure compliance. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE's Talent Office. AFHA shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education's acceptance of the plan.

In October of 2023, AFHA administrative staff will meet with the Accountability and Support Committee of the SBE and provide a status update of its corrective action plan to address student achievement, chronic absenteeism, and teacher certification. At that time the Accountability and Support Committee members and department staff will analyze the performance data to determine if the prioritized strategies in the corrective action plans are making an impact on student outcomes and teacher practice. The school will also provide an update of its efforts to develop an EESP aligned to the revised *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation (2023)* and submit the EESP to the CSDE for review and approval by April 1, 2024. Dependent on the status of the issues discussed, AFHA administrative staff may be called back to meet with the Accountability and Support Committee to provide a second update in the spring of 2024 and bring forth an analysis of performance data and other metrics specific to each corrective action plan.

Recognizing that AFHA must adequately address student achievement, chronic absenteeism, and teacher certification through corrective actions, pursuant to Section 10-66bb(h) of the C.G.S., the Commissioner of Education may, at any time, place a charter school on probation if the school has failed to adequately demonstrate student progress or comply with applicable laws and regulations.

The CSDE will notify AFHA of action taken by the SBE following its meeting on April 5, 2023. The school will be advised of relevant technical assistance opportunities designed to improve its educational program. The CSDE will conduct follow-up visits to ensure AFHA is addressing the issues raised in this memorandum.

Prepared by: Robert E. Kelly, Charter School Program Manager
Turnaround Office

Reviewed by: Irene E. Parisi, M.Ed.
Chief Academic Officer

CHARTER RENEWAL REPORT | 2022

Charter School Information		
Charter School Name:	Achievement First Hartford Academy	
School Director/ Principal:	Raven Obas	
School Board Chairperson:	Erwin Hurst, Sr.	
Location (City/Town):	Hartford	
Rating Key		
Meets	The school demonstrates effective policies and practices, resulting in positive outcomes.	
Pending Action	The school requires minor modifications to its policies and/or practices. The school is taking satisfactory measures to remedy and address these issues in a timely manner.	
Does Not Meet	The school falls below performance expectations with significant concerns noted, which require immediate attention and intervention.	
Standard 1: School Performance Indicators	Points/Max	% Points Earned
Accountability Index:	992.3/1450	68.4
Notes and Evidence:		
<p>Achievement First Hartford Academy (AFHA) 2021-22 Accountability Index of 68.4 percent is 1.3 percentage points below the state’s Accountability Index of 69.7 percent. Schools that meet Standard 1: are schools earning an accountability index score from 85 to 100 (Category 1), schools earning an accountability index score from 70 to 84.9 percent (Category 2), and schools earning an accountability index score of 69.9 percent or lower and have not been identified as a Turnaround or Focus School (Category 3). AFHA’s Accountability Index score of 68.4 percent places its performance in Category 3, which earns a does not meet for Standard 1. AFHA’s 2021-22 Next Generation Accountability Report is shown in detail on the next page.</p>		

Next Generation Accountability, 2021-22 – Achievement First Hartford Academy (Grades: K-12)
School Category: 3

Indicator	Index/Rate	Target	Points Earned	Max Points	% Points Earned	State % Points Earned
1a. ELA Performance Index - All Students	60.1	75	40.0	50	80.1	85.6
1b. ELA Performance Index - High Needs Students	59.1	75	39.4	50	78.9	72.3
1c. Math Performance Index - All Students	52.5	75	35.0	50	70.0	78.2
1d. Math Performance Index - High Needs Students	51.8	75	34.6	50	69.1	63.6
1e. Science Performance Index - All Students	48.3	75	32.2	50	64.4	81.9
1f. Science Performance Index - High Needs Students	48.1	75	32.1	50	64.2	68.4
2a. ELA Academic Growth - All Students	70.4%	100%	70.4	100	70.4	60.4
2b. ELA Academic Growth - High Needs Students	69.1%	100%	69.1	100	69.1	56.2
2c. Math Academic Growth - All Students	74.2%	100%	74.2	100	74.2	65.2
2d. Math Academic Growth - High Needs Students	74.8%	100%	74.8	100	74.8	59.1
2e. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Literacy	60.9%	100%	30.5	50	60.9	64.9
2f. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Oral	52.3%	100%	26.2	50	52.3	57.4
4a. Chronic Absenteeism - All Students	53.2%	<=5%	0.0	50	0.0	25.1
4b. Chronic Absenteeism - High Needs Students	56.4%	<=5%	0.0	50	0.0	0.0
5. Preparation for CCR - Percent Taking Courses	93.9%	75%	50.0	50	100.0	100.0
6. Preparation for CCR - Percent Passing Exams	19.0%	75%	12.7	50	25.4	58.0
7. On-track to High School Graduation	83.1%	94%	44.2	50	88.4	87.9
8. 4-year Graduation: All Students (2021 Cohort)	100.0%	94%	100.0	100	100.0	95.3
9. 6-year Graduation: High Needs Students (2019 Cohort)	100.0%	94%	100.0	100	100.0	90.6
10. Postsecondary Entrance (Graduating Class 2021)	79.5%	75%	100.0	100	100.0	88.2
11. Physical Fitness (estimated participation rate = 47.3%)	14.4%	75%	0.0	50	0.0	61.1
12. Arts Access	32.5%	60%	27.1	50	54.2	87.4
Accountability Index			992.3	1450	68.4	69.7

Gap Indicators

Indicator	Non-High Needs Rate	High Needs Rate	Size of Gap	State Gap Mean +1 Standard Deviation	Is Gap an Outlier?
ELA Performance Index Gap	64.3	59.1	5.2	16.6	N
Math Performance Index Gap	55.4	51.8	3.6	18.2	N
Science Performance Index Gap	48.8	48.1	0.6	17.4	N
Graduation Rate Gap (2019 Cohort)	.	100.0	.	10.2	

If the Non-High Needs Rate exceeds the ultimate target (75 for Performance Index and 94% for Graduation Rate), the ultimate target is used for gap calculations. If the size of the gap exceeds the state mean gap plus one standard deviation, the gap is an outlier.

Assessment Participation Rates

Indicator	Participation Rate (%)
ELA - All Students	99.2
ELA - High Needs Students	99.0
Math - All Students	97.3
Math - High Needs Students	97.1
Science - All Students	96.8
Science - High Needs Students	95.9

Minimum participation standard is 95%.

Standard 2: Stewardship, Governance, and Management Indicators:	Rating
2.1. Fiscal Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.2. Financial Reporting and Compliance	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.3. Financial Viability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.4. Governance and Management	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.5. School Facility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
Notes and Evidence:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 2.1: The CSDE site visit staff reviewed AFHA’s last three certified financial audits and uncovered no significant findings, conditions, or internal control weaknesses. Indicator 2.2: The CSDE site visit staff reviewed AFHA’s last three certified financial audits, Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM), board procedures, budgets, and interviewed the school’s principals, director of operations, and governing board members. Staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit determined the APPM contained the standard sections of an APPM. However, the APPM required amendments in the areas of credit card statement review and approval by the Board Treasurer and establishing and maintaining assets on inventory. The AFHA Board of Directors and its Finance and Audit Committee have specific roles and responsibilities for oversight of school operations, including financial management, the leadership team and CMO. However, the roles and responsibilities are not formally documented in a Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM) to ensure consistency and continuity. The missing items include the monthly credit card review, annual review and approval of school policy and procedures by the governing board and charter school management organization (CMO) evaluation in compliance with the site visit findings. The reviewers determined AFHA completed on-time submission of certified audits and annual budgets. The school anticipates amending its APPM to include the missing items and present it for review and approval of the governing board at its June 1, 2023, meeting. The school indicated the BPPM is currently being revised for the next board term beginning in June 2023. The revision will formally document the roles and responsibilities of the governing board and its Finance and Audit Committee for the oversight of school operations. Indicator 2.3: Staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit reviewed AFHA’s latest certified financial audit and determined its debt-to-asset ratio (total liabilities/total assets), total margin (net income/total revenue), days of unrestricted cash (unrestricted cash/((total expenditures – depreciation)/365)), and cash flow (change in cash balance) meets or exceeds the ranges recommended by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), signifying overall financial health. 	

- **Indicator 2.4:** A review of AFHA’s school policies regarding conflict of interest and nepotism were found to comply with the CSDE administrative oversight guidelines. AFHA’s policies and procedures regarding background checks of staff and board members, open board meetings, board membership, and membership training were reviewed and found to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. This finding is supported by a review of school policies and procedures, background checks, board training records, and the school’s website including board meeting minutes. A review of AFHA’s bylaws found them to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. As indicated in Indicator 2.2, it is important that going forward the board establishes and follows its oversight responsibilities of school policy review and CMO evaluation on an annual basis.
- **Indicator 2.5:** As evidenced during the site visit, AFHA has safe and well-maintained school facilities to support teaching and learning. The facility has been approved by the Hartford Fire Marshal and Building Department. The school has proof of property insurance.

Standard 3: Student Population Indicators	Rating
3.1. Recruitment and Enrollment Process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.2. Waitlist and Enrollment Data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.3. Demographic Representation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.4. Family and Community Support	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.5. School Culture and Climate	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DNM

Notes and Evidence:

- Indicator 3.1:** The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2022-23 reported 1,041 students in Grades K-12 with 100 percent residing in Hartford (the host district). A review of the school’s student enrollment policy, and interviews with school staff, board members, and parents determined all students are admitted through a blind lottery.
- Indicator 3.2:** A review of AFHA’s waiting list information (Table 5, page 18) determined that the school maintains a waiting list of families beyond the available number of seats. In 2022-23, 32 students were on the waiting list. The waiting list has included more than 31 students each year for the past three years.
- Indicator 3.3:** A review of AFHA’s latest CSDE audited Public School Information System (PSIS) data from 2022-23 reported 47.0 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The percentage of special education students is 10.0 percent. AFHA’s multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs) population is 4.8 percent.
- Indicator 3.4:** AFHA demonstrates strong community support, as evidenced by parent interviews conducted by the CSDE renewal team on the day of the site visit. The parent focus group described various communication methods between the school and families, including texts, phone calls, emails, and written communication including translations in second languages, when necessary. Currently, parents report receiving regular updates from the school that detail student academics and behavior. Parents expressed support for what they perceive is a good educational model that prepares their children for high school and beyond. Parents indicated they were satisfied with the school’s commitment to serving students with diverse needs while providing a safe and nurturing environment. Students and graduates, who testified during the public hearing on January 26, 2023, and student interviews conducted by the CSDE renewal team on the day of the site visit reported they were generally happy with the school and choice opportunity that the school provides. Over 30 people attended the public hearing. Fourteen individuals offered testimony supporting the school’s efforts and the renewal of the charter. No one spoke out against the renewal of the school’s charter.
- Indicator 3.5:** School culture and climate policies reviewed by the CSDE’s site visit staff were clear and concise. Classroom observations revealed consistent implementation of the school’s behavior management model. AFHA’s 2021-22 suspension rate of 11.2 percent was in keeping with the host district’s 11.7 percent and was above state’s 6.5 percent. AFHA’s suspension rate did increase 3.1 percentage points from 8.1 percent in 2019-20 to 11.2 percent in 2021-22. AFHA’s chronic absenteeism rate of 53.2 percent in 2021-22 was above the state average of 23.7 percent by 29.5 percentage points and increased 44.7 percentage points from 8.5 percent in 2019-20. AFHA must refine efforts to improve student engagement and attendance.

Standard 4: Legal Compliance Indicators	Rating
4.1. Open Meetings/Information Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.2. Students with Disabilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.3. English Learners	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.4. Rights of Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.5. Teacher/Staff Credentials, TEAM, and EESP	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.6. Employee Rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
Notes and Evidence:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>Indicator 4.1: The school’s website and governing board documents demonstrated that the governing board meetings are open and accessible to the public. The governing board’s meeting schedule for the year and meeting agendas are posted on the school’s website. Education records and testing data are kept in locked file cabinets in a secure room.</p> <p>Indicator 4.2: A review of AFHA’s latest audited 2021-22 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reported the percentage of special education students at the school is 10.0 percent. All special education identified students reside in Hartford. To meet the needs of identified students, AFHA employed three special education deans, eight full-time special education teachers, seven paraprofessionals, and a social worker. At the time of the site visit, two special education teachers at the high school recently resigned. The school was actively seeking new hires to replace the two vacancies. The school developed a special education service coverage plan to ensure special education services were not missed and were being provided by a special education dean. Students receive required related services outlined in the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) via on-site charter school staff, HPS staff, and independent contractors. The special education deans maintain logs of related services provided at the middle school and high school. At the elementary school, the special education dean meets regularly with the related service providers to monitor implementation. A formal service log is not kept. All the IEPs reviewed noted that students receive specialized instruction services via push-in and pull-out methods in accordance with the student’s IEP.</p> <p>The special education deans utilize “IEPs at a glance” to review each student’s IEP with the special education teachers and the student’s general education teacher. This includes the review of the accommodations and modifications for each identified student. The special education teachers follow-up with the general education teachers to collaborate and provide support, answer questions, and ensure accommodations and modifications are being implemented per the student’s IEP. All new teachers receive special education training, provided by CMO staff, prior to starting employment at the school. The special education deans also provide continuous learning opportunities throughout the school year regarding a variety of topics related to special education. The special education deans schedule and coordinate all the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings. special education deans, school and host district special education staff, and relevant related service providers attend all the PPT meetings. Currently, the parents have the option to meet virtually for the PPT meeting or to meet in person at the charter school. The special education deans work with host district representatives to ensure IEPs are completed and finalized.</p> <p>Student education files are kept in locked file cabinets in a secure room. All files reviewed were found to be well-organized and maintained. The special education deans reported that either a sign-in/sign-out sheet is outside each cabinet or in each individual student file.</p> 	

The CSDE site visit team encouraged the administration to develop a formal system to verify the provision of related services. The team encouraged the administration to continue to closely monitor the progress of all students impacted by the special education teacher vacancies at the high school, and review/revise IEPs, as needed, and determine any required compensatory education. The team encouraged the administration to consider reviewing new students' IEPs more than annually to determine if it would be appropriate to revise the IEP based on the student's progress. Similarly, the school may want to provide professional development regarding the requirement to convene a PPT meeting to review the student's IEP if the student is making unsatisfactory and/or limited progress on the goals and objectives in the student's IEP, and to consider training regarding the PPT decision-making process as it relates to Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Since the CSDE site visit, the school agreed and will continue to monitor the progress of all students impacted by special education teacher vacancies at all academy levels. The school will track all compensatory education owed to the students and ensure that this information is communicated to the families and host district. The school agreed and will begin to use a verification log to track related service hours provided by host district providers. If the school notices any trends of missing services, it will work with related services providers and the host district to ensure that students are receiving their mandated services. AFHA will conduct professional development for its special education deans and staff focused on using progress monitoring to drive decisions regarding progress towards the student's IEP goals. The professional development will also support special education deans and staff with making appropriate adjustments to the IEP if the student is making unsatisfactory and/or limited progress. Lastly, the school committed to notifying its host district of instances where students are making unsatisfactory and/or limited progress and will work with the host district to schedule program reviews to update IEPs accordingly.

- **Indicator 4.3:** A review of AFHA's latest audited 2021-22 PSIS data reports indicated that the percentage of students identified as MLs/ELs at the school is 4.8 percent. Through an analysis of the renewal materials and meeting with stakeholder groups, it became evident that AFHA is committed to ensuring the success of MLs/ELs at the school. The school has taken actions that affirm this commitment to MLs/ELs by enhancing its resource and guidance documents pertaining to MLs/ELs and by working to address staffing issues related to TESOL (formerly Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) and bilingual personnel, including attempting to hire a certified bilingual teacher. Additionally, the school is committed to providing training to teachers to enable them to integrate ML/EL supports in the core curriculum. The school has applied for the Title III grant funds for which it is eligible, as it has done in preceding years. The school has taken the required actions as a bilingual mandated district to complete the bilingual grant application and submit with the bilingual grant application a TESOL in lieu of letter to the Commissioner of Education, and post for a certified bilingual teacher. The school is commended for taking these actions and providing a comprehensive collection of the ML/EL forms, procedures, and assessments in its Charter Renewal Application materials. However, a review of the school's ML/EL Screening Guidance determined amendments were required. The school is in the process of making the necessary policy amendments.
- **Indicator 4.4:** AFHA student rights policies and procedures include admissions, handling of student information, due process protections, and state nondiscrimination laws. Interviews with parents and staff at the school supported the proper implementation and use of the policies.

- Indicator 4.5:** A review of AFHA’s staff file of February 17, 2023, reported 87.0 percent of staff in compliance with certification. It is the responsibility of the school to take steps to ensure that 100 percent of the staff holds appropriate certificates, permits, or authorizations for their positions. Current legislation requires that at least 50 percent of educators serving in a charter school must hold a valid certificate (Initial, Provisional, or Professional Certificate) and the remaining 50 percent may hold other interim certificates, temporary certificates, permits, or authorizations. Of the 100 staff members requiring certification, 43.1 staff members or 43.1 percent hold a valid certificate, and 43.9 staff members or 43.9 percent hold other temporary certificates, permits, or authorizations. The remaining 13.0 staff members or 13.0 percent have no active certification/permit on file or are serving in an assignment that does not match a valid endorsement. Of the 50 percent allowed to serve under other interim certificates, temporary permits, or authorizations, legislation also allows for the issuance of a Charter School Educator Permit (CSEP) for no more than 30 percent of the educators serving in a charter school. AFHA currently has 11.55 staff members or 11.55 percent holding CSEPs.

AFHA is in partial compliance with the Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program. AFHA has 11 trained mentors, which is sufficient to serve the number of beginning teachers. There is one trained Reflection Paper Reviewer at the school. Beginning teachers submit 2-3 module reflection papers each year for review. AFHA needs to review at least the same number of reflection papers from the statewide portal as are submitted by AFHA’s beginning teachers. AFHA needs to have at least five additional Reflection Paper Reviewers trained to review reflection papers from the statewide portal. The one trained Reflection Paper Reviewer will need to review more than 5 papers or the other Achievement First schools will need to help meet the requirement. The school is committed to ensuring that the required reflection paper reviews are completed by the one trained Reflection Paper Reviewer.

AFHA is out of compliance with Educator Evaluation and Support (EES). The CSDE approved Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP) that is currently on file for AFHA was initially submitted for the 2015-16 school year and was approved by the CSDE under the conditions of a waiver from some components of the *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation*, which has now expired. The CSDE EES Council, known in the C.G.S. as the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC), recommended to the State Board of Education (SBE) to revise *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation* which the SBE approved on March 1, 2023, as well as a to plan for implementation of the revised *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation* by districts (including charter schools).

Given the amount of time and commitment of staff to revise and develop a new EESP and to train educators and evaluators to implement the EESP with fidelity for the 2023-24 school year, AFHA will continue to implement either the 2015-16 EESP that is currently in place, and adopt the Flexibilities to the *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation* (2017) in their entirety. During the 2023-24 school year, AFHA’s Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) shall be required to develop an EESP aligned to the revised *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation* (2023), submit the EESP to the CSDE for review and approval by April 1, 2024, and implement the new EESP in accordance with the SBE-adopted implementation plan for the 2024-25 school year.

- Indicator 4.6:** A review of legal actions brought against AFHA determined that no government agency alleged the violation of any law by the school or undertaken any investigation of any violation of law by the school.

Prepared by:	Reviewed by:
Robert E. Kelly Charter School Program Manager	Irene E. Parisi Chief Academic Officer

ACHIEVEMENT FIRST HARTFORD ACADEMY TABLES

Table 1: 2022-23 Student Enrollment and Demographic Information	
Grades served:	K-12
Total enrollment:	1,041
Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals:	47.0
Percentage of students with disabilities:	10.0
Percentage of students identified as English Learners:	5.3
Percentage of American Indian or Alaska Native students:	1.1
Percentage of Asian students:	*
Percentage of Black or African American students:	74.9
Percentage of Hispanic or Latino students:	22.0
Percentage of Two or More Races:	1.6
Percentage of White students:	*

*N<=5. Data suppressed to ensure student data privacy.

Table 2: School Performance: All Students									
Indicator	2017-18			2018-19			2021-22		
	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
Accountability Index	81.3	59.6	74.9	74.8	59.9	74.2	68.4	56.8	69.7
ELA-All Students									
Performance Index (Target 75)	68.5	52.4	67.6	68.9	52.7	67.7	60.1	48.3	64.2
Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	73.0	54.8	60.7	60.2	51.4	59.9	70.4	51.9	60.4
Math-All Students									
Performance Index (Target 75)	63.8	47.8	62.7	65.1	47.3	63.1	52.5	41.5	58.6
Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	76.3	57.1	61.9	57.4	48.9	62.5	74.2	53.6	65.2
Graduation									
Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%)	88.6	70.7	88.3	96.9	72.5	88.5	N/A	N/A	N/A

In 2019-20, Connecticut received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to be exempt from administering state academic assessments and holding schools and districts accountable using the Next Generation Accountability System.

In 2020-21, Connecticut secured a waiver from the USDOE to be exempted from implementing the Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts; and while districts made their best effort to assess as many students as possible, there was not a requirement to test at least 95 percent of students as in past years. Additionally, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control. Also, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct. As such, 2020-21 testing data is not being used as part of this analysis.

ACHIEVEMENT FIRST HARTFORD ACADEMY

Table 3: School Performance-High Needs Students							*Data are suppressed to ensure confidentiality.		
	2017-18			2018-19			2021-22		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
ELA-High Needs Students									
Performance Index (Target 75)	68.5	49.8	57.5	68.9	50.2	58.1	59.1	46.0	54.2
Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	73.0	54.0	55.6	60.2	50.7	55.1	69.1	51.1	56.2
Math-High Needs Students									
Performance Index (Target 75)	63.8	45.2	52.0	65.1	44.8	52.7	51.8	39.3	47.7
Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	76.3	56.0	55.4	57.4	48.1	55.2	74.8	52.8	59.1
Graduation									
Six-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%)	100.0	74.2	85.2	100.0	77.0	85.2	N/A	N/A	N/A

In 2019-20, Connecticut received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to be exempt from administering state academic assessments and holding schools and districts accountable using the Next Generation Accountability System.

In 2020-21, Connecticut secured a waiver from the USDOE to be exempted from implementing the Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts; and while districts made their best effort to assess as many students as possible, there was not a requirement to test at least 95 percent of students as in past years. Additionally, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control. Also, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct. As such, 2020-21 testing data is not being used as part of this analysis.

ACHIEVEMENT FIRST HARTFORD ACADEMY

Table 4: School Culture and Climate				*Data are suppressed to ensure confidentiality					
	2018-2019			2019-2020¹			2021-2022		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
Chronic Absenteeism Rate (%)	6.5	25.4	10.4	8.5	27.9	12.2	53.2	46.0	23.7
Suspension Rate (%)	8.3	12.1	6.7	8.1	10.3	4.9	11.2	11.7	6.5
Discipline Tier	2	4	3	2	2	3	1	3	1

Table 5: AFHA Student Waitlist and Mobility Information			
Performance Metric:	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Waitlist number:	205	59	32
Number of enrolled students who left during the school year:	27	48	42
Number of students who did not re-enroll the next year and had not completed the highest grade at the school:	58	61	86

¹ In the 2019-20 school year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person classes were cancelled in mid-March; all districts switched to fully remote instruction for the remainder of the school year.