

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

Accountability and Support Committee

Thursday, October 19, 2023
450 Columbus Blvd.
Plaza North, Second Floor, Meeting Room B
Hartford, Connecticut

**Minutes
(Approved on April 11, 2024)**

I. Call to Order

Pursuant to the notice filed with the Secretary of the State, Committee Chairperson Erin D. Benham called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Committee

Members Present: Erin D. Benham
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Elwood Exley, Jr.
Dr. Karen Dubois-Walton

Committee

Members Absent: Malia K. Sieve

Staff Present:

Irene Parisi
Robert Kelley
Shakira Jacobs-Vazquez
Leslie Navarrete

Guests Present:

Karolyn Belcher, Interim Superintendent of Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Bridgeport
Stacy Gilison, Consultant, Team School Operations Achievement First

II. Approval of Minutes

Elwood Exley, Jr., moved, and Donald F. Harris, Jr., seconded, that the Committee approved the minutes of the September 20, 2023, Accountability and Support Committee meeting.

Vote: In Favor: Exley, Benham, Dubois-Walton, and Harris
Abstained: 0
Opposed: 0
Absent: Sieve

III. Achievement First Charter Schools Renewal Corrective Action Update

Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer for the CSDE Academic Office, shared a brief overview of the latest State Board of Education (Board) approved charter renewal and the approved corrective action plan for Achievement First (AF) charter schools. The Achievement First charter schools' charter renewal will be reviewed for approval by the Board in the April 2024 SBE meeting. Ms. Parisi welcomed Achievement First Bridgeport Academy Interim Superintendent Karolyn Belcher, and consultant of Team School Operations Achievement First Stacy Gilison to provide a progress update per the conditions of their latest charter renewal for:

- Achievement First Bridgeport
- Achievement First Hartford
- Amistad Academy
- Elm City College Prep

Achievement First shared with the Committee that academic curricula and teacher knowledge building around the new curricula are being developed; additional academic supports have been implemented to address students' academic needs, like enrichment programs; and recruitment efforts have been strengthened through the use of recruitment incentives, like offering signing bonuses, and the development of a reliable in-house teacher recruitment pipeline.

Despite the teacher recruitment challenges AF charter schools are facing in the areas of mathematics and special education, recruitment and retention continue to be a priority for Achievement First. Achievement First continues to look further into other supports and resources to fortify and grow the in-house teacher recruitment pipeline, such as forging a partnership with Teach For America; establishing a hiring committee that works alongside administrators and principals to strengthen the external and internal recruitment review processes; and requiring teacher applicants to submit paperwork confirming their teacher certification. Achievement First informed the Committee that if it is determined that a teacher application is not certified to teach and there isn't a feasible pathway for them to become a certified teacher then Achievement First recruits them for other staff positions. Achievement First is close to reaching 100 percent teacher certification compliance; October 31, 2023, is the teacher certification compliance deadline for Achievement First.

Chronic absenteeism continues to be a top priority for Achievement First; as a result, an attendance committee was established; cultural walkthroughs have been implemented at Achievement First Hartford; a robust mental health support system and resources to meet the needs of students and their families are being developed; and Achievement First is looking further into other supports and resources to address student transportation challenges with host districts and to strengthen outreach efforts to increase student enrollment. Achievement First added that they are focusing on providing these supports and resources to Achievement First Hartford and Achievement First Bridgeport.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:44 p.m.

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete