

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 2009-10 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.

2009-10 Best Practices

The enclosed *Summary of the Connecticut Charter Schools Best Practices Report* has been revised to report best practices informed by current educational research. The CSDE reviewed current educational research and identified effective practices and standards associated with improved student performance. The report lists the practices and standards each charter school identified as having the greatest impact on student achievement in their schools. The best practices are self-reported by the state charter schools in their 2009-10 annual reports submitted to the CSDE. The standards and indicators are as follows:

1. **Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment:** In successful schools, teaching and learning are continually adjusted on the basis of data collected through a variety of valid and reliable methods that indicate student progress and needs. The assessment results are interpreted and applied appropriately to improve individual student performance, the instructional program and curriculum.

Indicators

These research based indicators represent qualities found in successful schools.

- The goals for student performance are clear and explicit.
- A variety of valid and reliable assessments, which are free from cultural, racial, and gender bias, are used to evaluate student performance.
- Assessments are well designed and aligned with state standards, school curriculum and classroom instructional methods.
- There is a strong, continuous link among curriculum, teaching and assessment.
- Assessment methods, procedures and the amount of time allocated to assessment is in balance with the time allocated to instruction. All are closely monitored so that the maximum amount of useful data and information is obtained in the most efficient manner.

¹ *Choose Success! A Guide for Students and Their Families 2011-2012*. Connecticut State Department of Education

- Modifications are made as needed in assessment methods and procedures to address special needs of students.
 - When appropriate, assessment instruments are accompanied by clear descriptions of how the quality of student performance will be assessed and that decisions can be made to improve the performance of all students.
 - There is sufficient time allotted to interpret and use data and other information related to student performance of individual students and groups of students over time, so that decisions can be made to improve the performance of all students.
 - There is sufficient time allotted to interpret and use data and other information related to student performance for the improvement of instruction and curriculum.
 - Assessment provides information to students and their parents on a timely basis so that they will become active participants in improving their performance.
 - Teachers and administrators receive training in how to create, use and interpret the results of tests and assessments to make changes that improve the performance of all students.
2. **Curriculum and Instruction:** High-performing schools have aligned curriculum with core learning expectations to improve the performance of all students. Students achieve high standards through rigorous, challenging learning. Staff delivers an aligned curriculum and implements research-based teaching and learning strategies. Students are actively involved in their learning through inquiry, in-depth learning, and performance assessments.

Indicators

These research based indicators represent qualities found in successful schools.

- Teachers allocate a significant amount of time to instruction with an emphasis on learning.
 - Instruction is personalized and emphasizes motivation as well as knowledge and skills.
 - All classes have a current standards-based curriculum that promotes enduring understanding of concepts and promotes learning across the disciplines, connections to the larger world, and skills for life-long learning.
 - Curriculum reflects clear and explicit goals and promotes consistency and continuity of learning to improve student performance.
 - Curriculum supports the practices of differentiated instruction and provides a continuous improvement model of teaching and learning to improve the performance of all students.
 - Curriculum promotes the students as motivated, constructive, self-reflective learners who take responsibility for improving their performance.
 - Teachers are involved in the development and review of curriculum using curriculum standards, student performance, and the needs of life-long learning as a focus for the review and revisions.
 - Teachers are engaged in a variety of professional development activities based on curricular goals and student performance.
 - The school system supports a systematic, systemic, and sustained process of curriculum improvement and implementation and provides appropriate instructional materials to implement the curriculum.
 - All staff can describe the degree to which student performance is improving.
 - Supervision, through ongoing classroom visitations by the principal, supports best instructional practices.
3. **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 staff.
- Professional development supports the expansion 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.

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.

Best Practices Summary

Charter School Name	Standard 1 Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment	Standard 2 Curriculum and Instruction	Standard 3 Professional Development
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	✓		
Achievement First Hartford	✓		
Amistad Academy	✓		
The Bridge Academy	✓		
The Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill	✓		
Common Ground High School		✓	
Elm City College Preparatory School	✓		
Explorations Charter School		✓	
Highville Charter School	✓		
Integrated Day Charter School		✓	
Interdistrict School for the Arts and Communication			✓
Jumoke Academy	✓		
New Beginnings Family Academy		✓	
Odyssey Community School		✓	
Park City Prep Charter School		✓	
Side By Side Community School		✓	
Stamford Academy	✓		
Trailblazers Academy	✓		

School Name:	Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	
Contact Person:	Challa Flemming, Principal Achievement First Bridgeport Academy 529 Noble Ave. Bridgeport, CT 06608 Telephone: 203-333-9128 Grades: 5-8	Katherine Baker, Principal Achievement First Bridgeport Elementary 655 Stillman Street Bridgeport, CT 06608 Telephone: 203-333-0593 Grades: K-4

BEST PRACTICES

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy (AFBA) is more than a great individual school. It is part of the Achievement First (AF) network of high-performing public charter schools and benefits from the best practices and efficiencies created by AF's team of finance, curriculum, talent development, operations, recruitment, human capital, technology, data and external relations experts. Achievement First centralizes and coordinates assessment and accountability practices across the network, providing infrastructure and support to AFBA 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 data at AFBA, and across the Achievement First network, to drive high student achievement.

Strategic use of data is the foundation of AFBA's student achievement accomplishments. While data-driven decision making is certainly not a new concept in education, AFBA and all Achievement First schools aim to intrinsically link student performance data to the resources and best practices needed to stimulate changes to instruction and performance improvement, and to build a data system powerful enough to support high-quality instructional planning at scale. This fervor around assessment data is not exclusively an effort to promote student preparation for state tests. The aim is to build a comprehensive performance management system that facilitates a continuous cycle of instructional improvement. AFBA's performance monitoring and accountability systems are driven by three main components: goal setting, student assessments, and staff evaluation and coaching.

Goal Setting: AFBA and all Achievement First schools aim to close the achievement gap for students, and have clear metrics for student outcomes that drive toward this goal, including performance on state tests and high school graduation, college matriculation and college graduation rates. In addition to tracking progress of these overarching goals, AFBA is evaluated annually on the Achievement First Report Card, which evaluates us on academic and nonacademic indices of a high-performing school, including student achievement, teacher and student retention, and parent satisfaction. AFBA uses its Achievement First Report Card evaluation to develop annual school goals that align with identified areas for improvement or advancement.

Student Assessments: Achievement First's curriculum experts outline the ambitious academic standards that all AFBA students are expected to master at each grade level, so that success in one grade can be seamlessly built on in the next. AFBA's curriculum for each grade level is divided into five cycles, each of which culminates in a cumulative interim assessment designed to track student progress toward goals, identify which standards require further instruction and determine which students require specific interventions. Interim assessments are clearly aligned to both AF and Connecticut standards and are formatted similar to Connecticut state tests. At the beginning of the school year, students take a baseline interim assessment that covers all of the standards in their grade-level curriculum. Subsequent interim assessments only measure those standards that have been taught. At the conclusion of the school year, the final interim assessment, like the first one of the school year, assesses students on all grade-level standards, enabling teachers to measure overall annual student progress.

Staff Evaluation and Coaching: Interim assessment results are uploaded to AF Athena, AF's custom built, web-based interim assessment platform, and teachers and principals dedicate a "Data Day" after each interim assessment to reviewing the assessment data together. Teachers use the data to adjust their unit plans, target their instruction and design interventions for struggling students during the next interim assessment cycle. This regular monitoring of student progress gives AFBA teachers the information and flexibility they need to continuously target their instruction to meet student needs. Achievement First designed, built and launched AF Athena in 2007 to replace a laborious and manual process of tracking and analyzing interim assessment results using Microsoft Excel, pencil and paper. Since then, the efficiency of AFBA's data analysis and the effectiveness of planning have greatly increased. AF Athena explicitly supports instructional planning activities by methodically walking teachers through the development of data-driven instructional plans, including the prioritization of standards for whole class re-teaching and cumulative review, structured small-group instruction, and one-on-one interventions. Perhaps most important, AF Athena supports teachers in diagnosing why students struggled and specific deficits in understanding.

Achievement First Bridgeport (cont.)

AF Athena also allows teachers to analyze student assessment data by teacher, student, standard and question, promoting collaboration among teachers in the development of instructional strategies for re-teaching, reviewing and working with struggling students. In addition, every school leader and teacher has an instructional coach who utilizes a combination of observations and student data to help teachers continuously improve their instruction throughout each interim assessment cycle.

AF is now focused on maximizing AF Athena to elevate AFBA’s data and instructional practices. In particular, AF is focused on extending the scope of the data processed and analyzed by AF Athena to capture and link data on teacher instruction to student outcomes, establish a framework for teacher coaches to use data on an ongoing basis with their teachers, develop a library of best instructional practices, and migrate to AF Athena other formative assessment data, such as Fountas & Pinnell, which teachers use to diagnose and monitor student progress. Achievement First believes that these additional capabilities will enhance teacher effectiveness and improve academic outcomes for AFBA students.

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 Academy	
Contact Person:	Jeffrey House, Executive Director Achievement First Hartford Academy 305 Greenfield St. Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-695-6760 Grades: 5-7	Clair Shin, Principal Achievement First Hartford Academy 395 Lyme St. Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-695-5280 Grades: K-3

BEST PRACTICES

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

Achievement First Hartford Academy is more than a great individual school. It is 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 assessment and accountability practices across the network, providing infrastructure and support to Achievement First Hartford 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 data at Achievement First Hartford Academy, and across the Achievement First network, to drive high student achievement.

Strategic use of data is the foundation of Achievement First Hartford Academy’s student achievement accomplishments. While data-driven decision making is certainly not a new concept in education, Achievement First Hartford Academy and all Achievement First schools aim to intrinsically link student performance data to the resources and best practices needed to stimulate changes to instruction and performance improvement, and to build a data system powerful enough to support high-quality instructional planning at scale. This fervor around assessment data is not exclusively an effort to promote student preparation for state tests. The aim is to build a comprehensive performance management system that facilitates a continuous cycle of instructional improvement. Achievement First Hartford Academy’s performance monitoring and accountability systems are driven by three main components: goal setting, student assessments, and staff evaluation and coaching.

Goal Setting: Achievement First Hartford Academy and all Achievement First schools aim to close the achievement gap for students, and have clear metrics for student outcomes that drive toward this goal, including performance on state tests and high school graduation, college matriculation and college graduation rates. In addition to tracking progress of these overarching goals, Achievement First Hartford Academy is evaluated annually on the Achievement First Report Card, which evaluates us on academic and nonacademic indices of a high-performing school, including student achievement, teacher and student retention, and parent satisfaction. Achievement First Hartford Academy uses its Achievement First Report Card evaluation to develop annual school goals that align with identified areas for improvement or advancement.

Student Assessments: Achievement First’s curriculum experts outline the ambitious academic standards that all Achievement First Hartford Academy students are expected to master at each grade level, so that success in one grade can be seamlessly built on in the next. Achievement First Hartford Academy’s curriculum for each grade level is divided into five cycles, each of which

Achievement First Hartford (cont.)

culminates in a cumulative interim assessment designed to track student progress toward goals, identify which standards require further instruction and determine which students require specific interventions. Interim assessments are clearly aligned to both Achievement First and Connecticut standards and are formatted similar to Connecticut state tests. At the beginning of the school year, students take a baseline interim assessment that covers all of the standards in their grade-level curriculum. Subsequent interim assessments only measure those standards that have been taught. At the conclusion of the school year, the final interim assessment, like the first one of the school year, assesses students on all grade-level standards, enabling teachers to measure overall annual student progress.

Staff Evaluation and Coaching: Interim assessment results are uploaded to AF Athena, Achievement First’s custom-built, web-based interim assessment platform, and teachers and principals dedicate a “Data Day” after each interim assessment to reviewing the assessment data together. Teachers use the data to adjust their unit plans, target their instruction and design interventions for struggling students during the next interim assessment cycle. This regular monitoring of student progress gives Achievement First Hartford Academy teachers the information and flexibility they need to continuously target their instruction to meet student needs. Achievement First designed, built and launched AF Athena in 2007 to replace a laborious and manual process of tracking and analyzing interim assessment results using Microsoft Excel, pencil and paper. Since then, the efficiency of Achievement First Hartford Academy’s data analysis and the effectiveness of planning have greatly increased. AF Athena explicitly supports instructional planning activities by methodically walking teachers through the development of data-driven instructional plans, including the prioritization of standards for whole class re-teaching and cumulative review, structured small-group instruction, and one-on-one interventions. Perhaps most important, AF Athena supports teachers in diagnosing why students struggled and specific deficits in understanding. AF Athena also allows teachers to analyze student assessment data by teacher, student, standard and question, promoting collaboration among teachers in the development of instructional strategies for re-teaching, reviewing and working with struggling students. In addition, every school leader and teacher has an instructional coach who utilizes a combination of observations and student data to help teachers continuously improve their instruction throughout each interim assessment cycle.

Achievement First is now focused on maximizing AF Athena to elevate Achievement First Hartford Academy’s data and instructional practices. In particular, Achievement First is focused on extending the scope of the data processed and analyzed by AF Athena to capture and link data on teacher instruction to student outcomes, establish a framework for teacher coaches to use data on an ongoing basis with their teachers, develop a library of best instructional practices, and migrate to AF Athena other formative assessment data, such as Fountas & Pinnell, which teachers use to diagnose and monitor student progress. Achievement First believes that these additional capabilities will enhance teacher effectiveness and improve academic outcomes for Achievement First Hartford Academy students.

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:	Amistad Academy		
Contact Person:	Amanda Alonzy, Principal Elementary School 540 Ella Grasso Blvd. New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-2166 Grades: Kindergarten-2	Matthew Taylor, Principal Middle School 407 James Street New Haven, CT 06513 Telephone: 203-773-0390 Grades: 5-8	Jeff Sudmyer, Principal High School 49 Prince Street New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-1092 Grades: 9-12

BEST PRACTICES

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

Amistad Academy (AA) is more than a great individual school. It is 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 assessment and accountability practices across the network, providing infrastructure and support to AA 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 data at AA, and across the Achievement First network, to drive high student achievement.

Amistad Academy (cont.)

Strategic use of data is the foundation of AA's student achievement accomplishments. While data-driven decision making is certainly not a new concept in education, AA and all Achievement First schools aim to intrinsically link student performance data to the resources and best practices needed to stimulate changes to instruction and performance improvement, and to build a data system powerful enough to support high quality instructional planning at scale. This fervor around assessment data is not exclusively an effort to promote student preparation for state tests. The aim is to build a comprehensive performance management system that facilitates a continuous cycle of instructional improvement. AA's performance monitoring and accountability systems are driven by three main components: goal setting, student assessments, and staff evaluation and coaching.

Goal Setting AA and all Achievement First schools aim to close the achievement gap for our students, and we have clear metrics for student outcomes that drive toward this goal, including performance on state tests and high school graduation, college matriculation and college graduation rates. In addition to tracking progress of these overarching goals, AA is evaluated annually on the Achievement First Report Card, which evaluates us on academic and non-academic indices of a high-performing school, including student achievement, teacher and student retention, and parent satisfaction. AA uses its Achievement First Report Card evaluation to develop annual school goals that align with identified areas for improvement or advancement.

Student Assessments: Achievement First's curriculum experts outline the ambitious academic standards that all AA students are expected to master at each grade level, so that success in one grade can be seamlessly built on in the next. AA's curriculum for each grade level is divided into five cycles, each of which culminates in a cumulative interim assessment designed to track student progress toward goals, identify which standards require further instruction and determine which students require specific interventions. Interim assessments are clearly aligned to both Achievement First and Connecticut standards and are formatted similar to Connecticut state tests. At the beginning of the school year, students take a baseline interim assessment that covers all of the standards in their grade-level curriculum. Subsequent interim assessments only measure those standards that have been taught. At the conclusion of the school year, the final interim assessment, like the first one of the school year, assesses students on all grade-level standards, enabling teachers to measure overall annual student progress.

Staff Evaluation and Coaching: Interim assessment results are uploaded to AF Athena, Achievement First's custom-built, web-based interim assessment platform, and teachers and principals dedicate a "Data Day" after each interim assessment to reviewing the assessment data together. Teachers use the data to adjust their unit plans, target their instruction and design interventions for struggling students during the next interim assessment cycle. This regular monitoring of student progress gives AA teachers the information and flexibility they need to continuously target their instruction to meet student needs. Achievement First designed, built and launched AF Athena in 2007 to replace a laborious and manual process of tracking and analyzing interim assessment results using Microsoft Excel, pencil and paper. Since then, the efficiency of AA's data analysis and the effectiveness of planning have greatly increased. AF Athena explicitly supports instructional planning activities by methodically walking teachers through the development of data-driven instructional plans, including the prioritization of standards for whole class re-teaching and cumulative review, structured small-group instruction, and one-on-one interventions. Perhaps most important, AF Athena supports teachers in diagnosing why students struggled and specific deficits in understanding. AF Athena also allows teachers to analyze student assessment data by teacher, student, standard and question, promoting collaboration among teachers in the development of instructional strategies for re-teaching, reviewing and working with struggling students. In addition, every school leader and teacher has an instructional coach who utilizes a combination of observations and student data to help teachers continuously improve their instruction throughout each interim assessment cycle.

Achievement First is now focused on maximizing AF Athena to elevate AA's data and instructional practices. In particular, Achievement First is focused on extending the scope of the data processed and analyzed by AF Athena to capture and link data on teacher instruction to student outcomes, establish a framework for teacher coaches to use data on an ongoing basis with their teachers, develop a library of best instructional practices, and migrate to AF Athena other formative assessment data, such as Fountas & Pinnell, which teachers use to diagnose and monitor student progress. Achievement First believes that these additional capabilities will enhance teacher effectiveness and improve academic outcomes for AA students.

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:	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

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

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 programs. If contacted, we will happily provide more detailed information. Our unique practices are:

Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) Period—The high school has instituted a half-hour period everyday to pull students for a 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 SRBI daily. We believe this period has resulted in major gains for our students.

“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 points goal they must attend summer school! This program has drastically increased the number of students reading. Our student body of 262 passed over 4000 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 Scholastic Assessment Test (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 student’s 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:	The Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill
Contact Person:	Shandra Brown, Principal The Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill 1283 Asylum Avenue Hartford, CT 06105 Telephone: 860-231-7800 Grades: 6-8

BEST PRACTICES

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

In order to foster high academic achievement, the principal, literacy specialist and classroom teacher meet every month to review the progress of every child in reading, writing and math. The decision to adopt this practice was made to ensure that every child was being challenged appropriately based on their current achievement and skill level. Reviewing each child’s progress every four weeks allowed the team to form flexible groups based on skill attainment and to challenge children who were performing above grade level. The team met one time per month. Teachers brought current assessments, student work and other data to use as a basis for discussion and to make instructional decisions. Based on these assessments, flexible small groups were formed.

Explicit small group instruction is imperative to each student’s learning. The teacher and assistant were able to meet with all three small groups each day. Classroom assistances and specialists (special education teacher, speech and language pathologist) also coordinated their schedules to support students in the flexible groups by maximizing instructional time.

The individual differences of the students were considered as teachers planned large, small and individual lessons. Instruction was differentiated to meet the varied learning styles of the students. Instructional resources were provided to support these efforts. Beginning in kindergarten supplemental instruction was provided for students identified as being at risk. Instruction for these lessons was planned in five week increments. The practice of progress monitoring resulted in high achievement for our students.

MISSION

“...where children are treasured, is to foster a love of learning in an innovative, cooperative climate which empowers all students to be competent, productive, caring and responsible citizens. The Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill focuses on developing children’s vocabulary and literacy skills through hands-on, inquiry-based experiences. This family-centered school provides programming focused on development of the whole child with an emphasis on literacy.”

School Name:	Common Ground High School
Contact Person:	Lizanne Cox, 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

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Common Ground is committed to fostering the academic achievement of all students. During 2009-10, the school engaged in several curricular and instructional practices that resulted in dramatic improvements in student achievement on the state mastery test. Key curriculum and instructional practices utilized during 2009-10 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

Common Ground (cont.)

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 (more than 80 percent are young people of color). Students 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. 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 10 plus professors to campus 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 yearlong 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 2009-10, Common Ground developed and piloted 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 – yielded real results

A Schoolwide 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 schoolwide approach. A schoolwide 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. Schoolwide 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 nonfiction 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:	Morgan Barth, Principal Elementary School 240 Greene Street New Haven, CT 06511 Telephone: 203-498-0702 Grades: Kindergarten–5	Rebecca Good, Principal Middle School 794 Dixwell Avenue New Haven, CT 06511 Telephone: 203-772-5332 Grades: 6-8	Jeff Sudmyer, Principal High School 49 Prince Street New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-1092 Grade: 9

BEST PRACTICES

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

Elm City College Preparatory (ECCP) is more than a great individual school. It is part of the Achievement First (AF) network of high performing public charter schools and benefits from the best practices and efficiencies created by AF’s team of finance, curriculum, talent development, operations, recruitment, human capital, technology, data and external relations experts. AF centralizes and coordinates assessment and accountability practices across the network, providing infrastructure and support to ECCP 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 data at ECCP, and across the AF network, to drive high student achievement.

Strategic use of data is the foundation of ECCP’s student achievement accomplishments. While data-driven decision making is certainly not a new concept in education, ECCP and all AF schools aim to intrinsically link student performance data to the resources and best practices needed to stimulate changes to instruction and performance improvement, and to build a data system powerful enough to support high-quality instructional planning at scale. This fervor around assessment data is not exclusively an effort to promote student preparation for state tests. The aim is to build a comprehensive performance management system that facilitates a continuous cycle of instructional improvement. ECCP’s performance monitoring and accountability systems are driven by three main components: goal setting, student assessments, and staff evaluation and coaching.

Goal Setting: ECCP and all AF schools aim to close the achievement gap for our students, and we have clear metrics for student outcomes that drive toward this goal, including performance on state tests and high school graduation, college matriculation and college graduation rates. In addition to tracking progress of these overarching goals, ECCP is evaluated annually on the Achievement First Report Card, which evaluates us on academic and nonacademic indices of a high-performing school, including student achievement, teacher and student retention, and parent satisfaction. ECCP uses its Achievement First Report Card evaluation to develop annual school goals that align with identified areas for improvement or advancement.

Student Assessments: AF’s curriculum experts outline the ambitious academic standards that all ECCP students are expected to master at each grade level, so that success in one grade can be seamlessly built on in the next. ECCP’s curriculum for each grade level is divided into five cycles, each of which culminates in a cumulative interim assessment designed to track student progress toward goals, identify which standards require further instruction and determine which students require specific interventions. Interim assessments are clearly aligned to both AF and Connecticut standards and are formatted similar to Connecticut state tests. At the beginning of the school year, students take a baseline interim assessment that covers all of the standards in their grade-level curriculum. Subsequent interim assessments only measure those standards that have been taught. At the conclusion of the school year, the final interim assessment, like the first one of the school year, assesses students on all grade-level standards, enabling teachers to measure overall annual student progress.

Staff Evaluation and Coaching: Interim assessment results are uploaded to AF Athena, AF’s custom-built, web-based interim assessment platform, and teachers and principals dedicate a “Data Day” after each interim assessment to reviewing the assessment data together. Teachers use the data to adjust their unit plans, target their instruction and design interventions for struggling students during the next interim assessment cycle. This regular monitoring of student progress gives ECCP teachers the information and flexibility they need to continuously target their instruction to meet student needs.

AF designed, built and launched AF Athena in 2007 to replace a laborious and manual process of tracking and analyzing interim assessment results using Microsoft Excel, pencil and paper. Since then, the efficiency of ECCP’s data analysis and the effectiveness of planning have greatly increased. AF Athena explicitly supports instructional planning activities by methodically walking teachers through the development of data-driven instructional plans, including the prioritization of standards for whole class re-teaching and cumulative review, structured small-group instruction, and one-on-one interventions. Perhaps most important, AF Athena supports teachers in diagnosing why students struggled and specific deficits in understanding. AF Athena

Elm City College Preparatory School (cont.)

also allows teachers to analyze student assessment data by teacher, student, standard and question, promoting collaboration among teachers in the development of instructional strategies for re-teaching, reviewing and working with struggling students. In addition, every school leader and teacher has an instructional coach who utilizes a combination of observations and student data to help teachers continuously improve their instruction throughout each interim assessment cycle.

AF is now focused on maximizing AF Athena to elevate ECCP’s data and instructional practices. In particular, AF is focused on extending the scope of the data processed and analyzed by AF Athena to capture and link data on teacher instruction to student outcomes, establish a framework for teacher coaches to use data on an ongoing basis with their teachers, develop a library of best instructional practices, and migrate to AF Athena other formative assessment data, such as Fountas & Pinnell, which teachers use to diagnose and monitor student progress. Achievement First believes that these additional capabilities will enhance teacher effectiveness and improve academic outcomes for ECCP students.

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

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

- Instruction is personalized and emphasizes motivation as well as knowledge and skills. Explorations is designed to promote more individual attention by keeping class size to 15 to 1 or less. Staff has the duties of advisors to no more than 11 students and meets with them when the day starts for attendance and discussion about the day ahead. Often at this time motivational moments are seized. In addition each class group with their advisors meet monthly for an extended period to talk about how things are going and to offer, and direct to appropriate staff, assistance to students.
- All classes have a current standards-based curriculum that promotes enduring understanding of concepts and promotes learning across the disciplines, connections to the larger world, and skills for life-long learning.

All classes follow state standards for instruction. Our Mission, in part, is to promote the development of students to productive members of society. Our use of Adventure education (modeled on Outward Bound Philosophies) helps students become aware, in some cases, of ways to enjoy the outdoors and also integrates academic learning by making connections to math, science and history. Our job explorations program places our students in the work force for real exposure to what is involved in a career choice. Students learn skills and have the opportunity to interview professionals about career paths.

- Curriculum supports the practices of differentiated instruction and provides a continuous improvement model of teaching and learning to improve the performance of all students.

Explorations’ staff meets weekly to discuss student performance. The special education teacher and tutors are present and together we define ways to intervene with a student who is not making the ‘grade.’ Teachers are observed by the principal, at both arranged and spontaneous times, and the focus is on classroom management and delivery of instruction. We devote at least one in-service to expanding our knowledge and skills of differentiating instruction.

- Teachers are involved in the development and review of curriculum using curriculum standards, student performance, and the needs of life-long learning as a focus for the review and revisions.

With the 2009-10 year being a renewal year for Explorations all staff were involved in evaluating each other’s curriculum as well as looking at other models from other schools. Some changes were made and additions were added to existing curriculums.

Explorations Charter School (cont.)

- Teachers are engaged in a variety of professional development activities based on curricular goals and student performance.
- The lack of adequate funding from the State often makes it difficult to bring in ‘experts’ for professional development and/or to send teachers out to workshops. We did manage to pay for a three day CFA (Common Formative Assessment) training in the Spring of 2010 that has us perched now to work on a few major skills more closely in data teams on a monthly basis. If we can find funding we will look into another PD program that would expand our abilities to better serve our students.
- All staff can describe the degree to which student performance is improving.
- Our weekly staff meetings and the use of a weekly updated file that shows student performance, in general, in each class assists us in identifying students in need as well as monitoring student performance.

MISSION

“...to provide a public school that cultivates a positive attitude toward life-long learning in an experiential, nontraditional 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 Leeder Hill Drive
Hamden, CT 06517
Telephone: 203-287-0528
Grades: PK-8

BEST PRACTICES

Standard I: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

To create an environment that encourages student success, Highville has initiated a number of programs that provide both support and guidance. Using the Storybook Series by Houghton Mifflin, all Grades K-6 are provided with a guided reading program that allows students to experience success at the same time and increases academic achievement standards. Through benchmark tests (given three times a year) data is gathered by each grade level and discussed with the appropriate data teams. Teachers are better able to identify and target areas in need of improvement. Using a flexible grouping model students move more fluently through the reading curriculum. As an additional reinforcement, both the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Degree of Reading Power (DRP) are used as markers, measured against benchmark themes and weekly tests to ensure consistent growth. Highville has also incorporated technology through the use of laptop computers with access to Study Island which allows whole class and small group instruction to be modified to individual student needs.

Highville continues to work diligently on its mission to create global citizens. This year global studies will take a regional approach using themes such as agriculture, religion, politics, the economy and other areas to further expand our students understanding of international relations.

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

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Literacy Intervention Using a Push-in Model

The Literacy Intervention Push-in Model was initiated to increase reading achievement in kindergarten through fourth 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.

We began implementing the practice last year within two model classrooms. We increased this practice this 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 more effectively schedule and group students. It was necessary that we 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-4 team prior to the start of the school year, increased cross grouping, and 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.

Integrated Day (cont.)

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.

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

Standard 3: Professional Development

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 two 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.

During 2009-10 our professional development began before the contract year with two days of Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) training on “Making Standards Work,” facilitated by Ellen Dalton of LEARN which was funded by a grant. We continued our work with Ms. Dalton through planning sessions with her and the leadership team of ISAAC spaced throughout the year. The purpose of the planning sessions was to plan topics and activities for the follow up half 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 Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies (CRISS). We began peer observations as a way for staff to share with each other how they use the strategies taught and learned over time. Ellen Dalton also visited the school for a number of half days and sat in on classes and gave feedback. The peer observation program is planned to continue in 2010-11 assisted by the designation of a substitute teacher to relieve staff to be able to sit in on colleague’s classes.

Interdistrict School for the Arts and Communication (cont.)

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 meetings are facilitated by ISAAC's director of academics (full time teacher with added responsibilities and release time to devote to curriculum and instruction).

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 a half professional development day scheduled eight times at year (10 times in 2010-11) or during a monthly faculty meeting time.

After the start of the year, 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 statement which 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 ongoing, targeted professional development driven by results, based on standards, and embedded in our daily work to yield improvements in student learning;

Interdistrict School for the Arts and Communication (cont.)

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. Communitywide 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.

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

BEST PRACTICES

Jumoke Academy Elementary School

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

Through the Jumoke Academy data team, schoolwide goals were set and then specific grade level objectives were determined based on the most current data. For the 2009-10 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 Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) 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 CMTs for reading), Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessments for students in grades 2-5.

Following structured pacing guides, teachers provided interdisciplinary and motivational approaches to the targeted skills and strategies. Students were progress 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 (JAHSMaRT)

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

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 schoolwide 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 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,

Jumoke Academy (cont.)

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 2: Curriculum and Instruction

1. **A Longer School Day:** NBFA opens its doors each morning at 7:30 a.m. Classroom instruction begins at 8 a.m. and continues until 3:45 a.m., providing students with 7.75 hours of instruction each day compared to the 6.75 hours at traditional district schools.
2. **An After School Program:** NBFA offers an After School Program from 3:45 - 6:15 pm, providing 2.5 hours of additional instruction time five days a week for the students who need it the most.
3. **Summer Academy:** NBFA’s academic calendar includes 20 extra days of instruction during the month of July. 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 students, based on teacher referrals. In addition to providing recovery in mathematics, reading and writing to struggling students, advanced learners are exposed to such new skills as dance, guitar, drill team, Spanish and others.
5. **Morning Meetings:** 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, hardworking.
6. **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.
7. **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 2009-10, 88 percent of students who participated in CMT Academy improved their test scores by at least one performance level.
8. **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.
9. **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

New Beginnings Family Academy (cont.)

improve the lives of others in the greater Bridgeport area.

10. **Data Driven Decision Making:** NBFA uses interim assessments to plan instruction, enhancement and intervention to meet the unique academic needs of every student.

11. **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 have enriched the quality of education provided to NBFA’s students and positively impacted the environment in which they learn.

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

BEST PRACTICES

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Odyssey Community School (OCS) has been practicing targeted remediation for years; under the umbrella of Connecticut’s interpretation of Response to Intervention, we use Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) 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 schoolwide CMT scores.

In 2009–10, 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 brought a part-time special education teacher to full-time and we budgeted approximately \$6,000 for after-school tutoring for students in Tier 2. OCS 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 based on 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

Odyssey Community School (cont.)

interventions are indicated. Again, progress monitoring generally takes the form of customized Blue Ribbon tests. While we have not yet had a student in Tier 3 of SRBI, we anticipate that these interventions will be similar to Tier 2 interventions, except that the interventions will be delivered to one or two students at a time, rather than in a small group, and that the interventions will be of a more intensive nature.

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.

In 2010–11, we intend to bring an RTI specialist on board to administer our SRBI program; we will retain our current staff who deliver instruction and assessment, and we will also fund two part-time Language Arts teachers to specifically work with new Grade 4 students who often begin Grade 4 at OCS below grade level and deficient in their skills.

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

Standard 2: 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 on-going, 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 consultants from Cooperative Educational Services (CES), our teachers have developed curriculum and common formative assessments in Language Arts.
- Teachers have been trained by the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) in the areas of Common Formative Assessments, Data Driven Decision Making/Data Teams and Effective Teaching Strategies.
- Instructional hours have been increased substantially in both math and reading.
- Through our new, independent reading and accelerated math programs, we have been able to personalize instruction and learning to meet students’ individual needs.
- Reading in the content areas was embedded in both social studies and science classes.

Park City Prep Charter School (cont.)

- Through our Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) grant, we have embedded 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.
- Teachers have begun to look at student performance data in a more systematic way to inform their instruction. Data team training began last year and will be enhanced in the coming year to make this practice more efficient and effective. The initial CALI training last year will be followed by additional training from CES in 2010-11.
- Teacher leaders were assigned as mentors to support newer teachers in language arts and math to help less experienced teachers to ensure that best practices were being employed uniformly and effectively.
- The director worked closely with the consultants from CES as well as with the lead teachers to be sure that the enhancements and supports were implemented as planned.

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

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Much of the emphasis on instruction and assessment at Side By Side Community School (SBCS) 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 2009-10 were based on this approach.

CT Accountability for Learning Initiative at SBCS: In response to our most recent CSDE Charter Renewal proceedings, our student CMT scores, as well as to previously self-identified areas in need of improvement, SBCS’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 the area of interventions the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System was systemically implemented for all children reading below grade level in Grades K-4. This system was chosen based upon several specific criteria as well. Firstly, 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. Secondly it contains a 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. Lastly, 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.

Side By Side Community School (cont.)

During the 2008-09 school year, SBCS also purchased and introduced 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 SBCS. This school year, the SBCS Curriculum Coordinator became an active member in Connecticut's larger assessment community, and with support from the CALI and Lead and Learn, a Response to Intervention model was implemented. This process has involved:

- a) The 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.
- 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) Making referrals to the Title I and ELL interventions, and deciding upon appropriate and effective interventions.

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 SBCS to be guided by their teaching styles and philosophies. The Data Team, Curriculum Team and the Three Tier Intervention Plan are efforts 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 SBCS School during the 2009-10 school year and were most effective at fostering high academic achievement from our students.

Literacy How/Haskins Laboratories

The 2009-10 school year also marked the beginning of a 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 2009-10 school year also fostered a new professional development relationship 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 was delivered in both full day and coaching forums, and support was provided in the areas of both instruction and curriculum development.

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 2009-10 school year. Wrapping up its fourth 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.

Side By Side Community School (cont.)

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 SBCS'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 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.

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.

Side by Side (cont.)

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

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

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

Teacher Meetings – Held weekly on 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.

Schoolwide Projects – As described in this report, all students participated in schoolwide projects. The students were graded cross curricular. 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.

Stamford Academy (cont.)**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
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Contact Person:	Craig Baker, Director Trailblazers Academy P.O. Box 359 Stamford, CT 06904 Telephone: 203-977-5690 Grades: 6-8
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BEST PRACTICES**Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment****Formative Assessments and Data Teams**

Like many schools across Connecticut, Trailblazers Academy will continue to follow the statewide initiative to improve student performance by developing clear, essential standards and better aligning classroom assessments to those standards. Students continue to enter Grade 6 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 the 2009-10 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, the 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 Teachers 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.

Trailblazers Academy

The school will implement this model in its social studies classes in the 2010-11 school year, and its science and math classes 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.”