

## Summary of the Connecticut Charter Schools' Best Practices Report 2012

### Overview

This report represents a summary of the “best practices” self-reported by charter schools in the 2011-12 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.

### 2011-12 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 educational research and identified effective practices and standards associated with improved student performance. These standards will be reviewed and updated in future reports. 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 2011-12 annual reports submitted to the CSDE in three areas. The reports are edited for grammar and spelling but the content has not been altered. The standards and indicators used to identify best practices 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *Choose Success! A Guide for Students and Their Families 2012-2013*. Connecticut State Department of Education

- 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.
- 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 decisions can be made to improve the performance of all students.
- There is sufficient time allotted to interpret and use data, as well as 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 on a timely basis to students and their parents so that they will become active participants in improving the student's 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 own 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 own 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 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 establishes 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. The CSDE recommends that superintendents contact those charter schools whose best practices might be applicable to the mission and goals of their own 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		✓	
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	✓	✓	✓

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Achievement First Bridgeport Academy</b>		
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Katherine Baker, Principal Elementary School 655 Stillman St. Bridgeport, CT 06608 Telephone: 203-333-0593 Grades: K-2	Morgan Barth, Principal Middle School 529 Noble Ave. Bridgeport, CT 06608 Telephone: 203-333-9128 Grades: 5-8	Chris Bostock, Principal High School 49 Prince Street New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-1092 Grades: 9-10

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Standard 3: Professional Development - District Partnerships**

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy (AFB) is more than a great school — it is part of the Achievement First (AF) network of high-performing public charter schools, and, as a result, under the guidance of AF’s Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships, AFB is actively partnering with its host district, the Bridgeport Public Schools, to learn together about what is working and how to increase student performance more broadly. In a 2004 report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, researchers found that successful school leadership plays a highly significant role in improving student learning, and that improving school leadership is a key to successful large-scale reform. In 2010, based on a shared belief that the effectiveness of school leaders is one of the top drivers of student achievement, AF and the New Haven Public Schools entered into a strategic partnership to train high-potential candidates to serve as turnaround principals for the district’s highest-need schools. The resulting Residency Program for School Leadership is a one-year training program that leverages best practices, from both the traditional and charter contexts, to combine experiential residencies, seminar-style learning and intense, individualized coaching in the areas of educational leadership.

Following a research-and-development year, the Residency Program officially launched in June 2011, with an inaugural cohort of five New Haven residents and three Hartford school residents, who participated as emerging partners in the professional development opportunities offered through the Residency Program. Even as we continue to learn a great deal about the most effective design, structure and content for the program, we are encouraged by the successful launch and smooth operation of Year 1 (2011-12) of the Residency Program. In response to largely positive feedback from all involved and to the key lessons that the Residency Program is already yielding about how charters and traditional districts can work together to translate and transfer best practices for the benefit of all students, we have undergone a three-city expansion, in 2012-13, in order to offer the Residency Program to high-potential candidates in each of AF’s three Connecticut host districts: New Haven, Hartford and now, Bridgeport.

The Residency Program is guided by the following competency framework and core components, which combine coursework and clinical practice to give residents distinct experience in what they will do as school leaders: 1) pre-residency summer leadership development workshops focused on management and leadership; 2) two residencies and mentorships over the course of one academic year at a high-performing AF school, and at a district school with a high-impact principal; 3) weekly academic-year seminars to provide training and practice in key areas of school leadership and support residents in translating best practices to the school change context; 4) post-residency summer leadership development focused on district-specific school administration; and 5) ongoing professional development and support for program alumni. School residents from New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport will jointly participate as a single cohort in the Residency Program’s training and professional development, as well as conduct inter-visitations to each others' schools across the three districts. As a result, the Residency Program will facilitate valuable knowledge and best-practice sharing.

Ultimately, the Residency Program aims to yield improved student achievement at the district schools in which program alumni are placed as school leaders. Therefore, during 2012-13, we will pilot our alumni support for the five Year-1 residents from New Haven, including planning assistance in transitioning to school leadership, regular individualized coaching, and access to AF and the NHPS professional development opportunities. All Residency Program alumni placed as principals in New Haven will receive biweekly coaching support, while all alumni placed as assistant principals in New Haven will receive monthly coaching support with the opportunity for increased support, should they transition into a principal position in a subsequent year. In order to increase capacity and support over the long term, AF will work with our host districts to build leadership development capacity and transition ownership of alumni coaching following the resident’s first year as a principal.

We measure the success of the Residency Program using the following evaluation tools and metrics:

### **Achievement First Bridgeport (cont.)**

- In partnership with each district, AF implements a robust recruitment and selection process to identify and jointly agree upon a number of highly qualified residents, based upon a scoring rubric aligned to the Residency Program for School Leadership Competency Model.
- We measure resident participation in and feedback on each of the core components of the Residency Program curriculum through surveys and interviews.
- As they progress through their residency year, residents complete a series of assessments designed to demonstrate content knowledge and clinical ability in the areas of educational leadership, aligned with the Residency Program for School Leadership Core Competency Framework, Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards and Connecticut State Department of Education Standards for School Leaders.
- At agreed upon intervals during the residency year, residents complete a self-assessment and receive formal feedback from their coach.
- Upon successful completion of the Residency Program, a diagnostic tool of school health is used to quantify changes in a school's organizational capacity, under the leadership of Residency Program alumni, toward accelerating annual student academic growth.

The Residency Program represents a unique partnership to develop strong, new leaders for district schools because of the close partnership and coordination between the entity responsible for training the new school leaders, AFB and the school district in which the leaders will be placed. Unlike many traditional principal preparation programs, this allows for the direct and explicit transfer and application of best practices from one education sector to another—in this case, from the charter to the traditional school district contexts.

### ***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.”*

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Achievement First Hartford Academy</b>		
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Elizabeth Rudnick, Principal Elementary School 305 Greenfield St. Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-695-5280 Grades: K-4	Jeff House, Principal Middle School 305 Greenfield St. Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-695-5280 Grades: 5-8	Clair Shin, Principal High School 305 Greenfield St. Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-695-5280 Grades: 9

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Standard 3: Professional Development - District Partnerships**

Achievement First Hartford Academy (AFHA) is more than a great school — it is part of the Achievement First (AF) network of high-performing public charter schools, and, as a result, under the guidance of AF’s Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships, AFHA is actively partnering with its host district, Hartford, to learn together about what is working and how to increase student performance more broadly. In a 2004 report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, researchers found that successful school leadership plays a highly significant role in improving student learning and that improving school leadership is key to successful large-scale reform. In 2010, based on a shared belief that the effectiveness of school leaders is one of the top drivers of student achievement, AF and New Haven Public Schools entered into a strategic partnership to train high-potential candidates to serve as turnaround principals for the district’s highest-need schools. The resulting Residency Program for School Leadership is a one-year training program that leverages best practice, from both the traditional and charter contexts, to combine experiential residencies, seminar-style learning and intense, individualized coaching in the areas of educational leadership.

Following a research-and-development year, the Residency Program officially launched in June 2011, with an inaugural cohort of five New Haven residents and three Hartford residents, who participated as emerging partners in the professional development opportunities offered through the Residency Program. Even as we continue to learn a great deal about the most effective design, structure and content for the program, we are encouraged by the successful launch and smooth operation of Year 1 (2011-12) of the Residency Program. In response to largely positive feedback from all involved and the key lessons that the Residency Program is already yielding about how charters and traditional districts can work together to translate and transfer best practices for the benefit of all students, we have undergone a three-city expansion, in 2012-13, in order to offer the Residency Program to high-potential candidates in each of AF’s three Connecticut host districts: New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport.

The Residency Program is guided by the following competency framework and core components, which combine coursework and clinical practice to give residents distinct experience in what they will do as school leaders: 1) pre-residency summer leadership development workshops focused on management and leadership; 2) two residencies and mentorships over the course of one academic year at a high-performing AF school and at a district school with a high-impact principal; 3) weekly seminars during the academic year to provide training and practice in key areas of school leadership and to support residents in translating best practices to the school change context; 4) post-residency summer leadership development focused on district-specific school administration; and 5) ongoing professional development and support for program alumni. Residents from New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport will jointly participate as a single cohort in the Residency Program’s training and professional development, as well as conduct inter-visitations to each others’ schools across the three districts. As a result, the Residency Program will facilitate valuable knowledge and best practice sharing.

Ultimately, the Residency Program aims to yield improved student achievement at the district schools in which program alumni are placed as school leaders. Therefore, during 2012-13, we will pilot our alumni support for the five Year-1 residents from New Haven, including planning assistance in transitioning to school leadership, regular individualized coaching, and access to AF and NHPS professional development opportunities. All Residency Program alumni placed as principals in New Haven will receive biweekly coaching support, while all alumni placed as assistant principals in New Haven will receive monthly coaching support with the opportunity for increased support, should they transition into a principal position in a subsequent year. In order to increase capacity and support over the long term, AF will work with our host districts to build leadership development capacity and transition ownership of alumni coaching to district coaches following the resident’s first year as a principal.

We measure the success of the Residency Program using the following evaluation tools and metrics:

### **Achievement First Hartford (cont.)**

- In partnership with each district, AF implements a robust recruitment and selection process to identify and jointly agree upon a number of highly qualified residents, based upon a scoring rubric aligned to the Residency Program for the School Leadership Competency Model.
- We measure resident participation in and feedback on each of the core components of the Residency Program curriculum through surveys and interviews.
- As they progress through their residency year, residents complete a series of assessments designed to demonstrate content knowledge and clinical ability in the areas of educational leadership aligned with the Residency Program for School Leadership Core Competency Framework, Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards and Connecticut State Department of Education Standards for School Leaders.
- At agreed upon intervals during the residency year, residents complete a self-assessment and receive formal feedback from their coach.
- Upon successful completion of the Residency Program, a diagnostic tool of school health is used to quantify changes in a school's organizational capacity, under the leadership of Residency Program alumni, toward accelerating annual student academic growth.

The Residency Program represents a unique partnership to develop strong new leaders for district schools because of the close partnership and coordination between the entity responsible for training the new school leaders, AF and the school district in which the leaders will be placed. Unlike many traditional principal preparation programs, this allows for the direct and explicit transfer and application of best practices from one education sector to another—in this case, from the charter to the traditional school district contexts.

### ***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.”*



<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Amistad Academy</b>		
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Amanda Alonzy, Principal Elementary School 540 Ella Grasso Blvd. New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-2166 Grades: K-4	Sarah White, Principal Middle School 130 Edgewood Ave. New Haven, CT 06511 Telephone: 203-772-7000 Grades: 5-8	Chris Bostock, Principal High School 49 Prince Street New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-1092 Grades: 9-12

### BEST PRACTICES

#### Standard 3: Professional Development - District Partnerships

Amistad Academy is more than a great school — it is part of the Achievement First (AF) network of high-performing public charter schools, and, as a result, under the guidance of AF’s Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships, Amistad Academy is actively partnering with its host district, New Haven Public Schools (NHPS), to learn together about what is working and how to increase student performance more broadly. In a 2004 report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, researchers found that successful school leadership plays a highly significant role in improving student learning, and that improving school leadership is a key to successful large-scale reform. In 2010, based on a shared belief that the effectiveness of school leaders is one of the top drivers of student achievement, AF and the NHPS entered into a strategic partnership to train high-potential candidates to serve as turnaround principals for the district’s highest-need schools. The resulting Residency Program for School Leadership is a one-year training program that leverages best practices, from both the traditional and charter contexts, to combine experiential residencies, seminar-style learning and intense, individualized coaching in the areas of educational leadership.

Following a research-and-development year, the Residency Program officially launched in June 2011, with an inaugural cohort of five New Haven residents and three Hartford school residents, who participated as emerging partners in the professional development opportunities offered through the Residency Program. Even as we continue to learn a great deal about the most effective design, structure and content for the program, we are encouraged by the successful launch and smooth operation of Year 1 (2011-12) of the Residency Program. In response to largely positive feedback from all involved and the key lessons that the Residency Program is already yielding about how charters and traditional districts can work together to translate and transfer best practices for the benefit of all students, we have undergone a three-city expansion, in 2012-13, in order to offer the Residency Program to high-potential candidates in each of AF’s three Connecticut host districts: New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport.

The Residency Program is guided by the following competency framework and core components, which combine coursework and clinical practice to give residents distinct experience in what they will do as school leaders: 1) pre-residency summer leadership development workshops focused on management and leadership; 2) two residencies and mentorships over the course of one academic year at a high-performing AF school and at a district school with a high-impact principal; 3) weekly academic-year seminars to provide training and practice in key areas of school leadership, and to support residents in translating best practices to the school change context; 4) post-residency summer leadership development focused on district-specific school administration; and 5) ongoing professional development and support for program alumni. School residents from New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport will jointly participate as a single cohort in the Residency Program’s training and professional development, as well as conduct inter-visitations to each other’s schools across the three districts. As a result, the Residency Program will facilitate valuable knowledge and best practice sharing.

Ultimately, the Residency Program aims to yield improved student achievement at the district schools in which program alumni are placed as school leaders. Therefore, during 2012-13, we will pilot our alumni support for the five Year-1 residents from New Haven, including planning assistance in transitioning to school leadership, regular individualized coaching, and access to AF and NHPS professional development opportunities. All Residency Program alumni placed as principals in New Haven will receive biweekly coaching support, while all alumni placed as assistant principals in New Haven will receive monthly coaching support with the opportunity for increased support, should they transition into a principal position in a subsequent year. In order to increase capacity and support over the long term, AF will work with our host districts to build leadership development capacity and transition ownership of alumni coaching following the resident’s first year as a principal to district coaches.

We measure the success of the Residency Program using the following evaluation tools and metrics:

### **Amistad Academy (cont.)**

- In partnership with each district, AF implements a robust recruitment and selection process to identify and jointly agree upon a number of highly qualified residents, based upon a scoring rubric aligned to the Residency Program for School Leadership Competency Model.
- We measure resident participation in and feedback on each of the core components of the Residency Program curriculum through surveys and interviews.
- As they progress through their residency year, residents complete a series of assessments designed to demonstrate content knowledge and clinical ability in the areas of educational leadership, aligned with the Residency Program for School Leadership Core Competency Framework, Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards and Connecticut State Department of Education Standards for School Leaders.
- At agreed upon intervals during the residency year, residents complete a self-assessment and receive formal feedback from their coach.
- Upon successful completion of the Residency Program, a diagnostic tool of school health is used to quantify changes in a school's organizational capacity, under the leadership of Residency Program alumni, toward accelerating annual student academic growth.

The Residency Program represents a unique partnership to develop strong new leaders for district schools because of the close partnership and coordination between the entity responsible for training the new school leaders, AF and the school district in which the leaders will be placed. Unlike many traditional principal preparation programs, this allows for the direct and explicit transfer and application of best practices from one education sector to another—in this case, from the charter to the traditional school district contexts.

### ***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.”*

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

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Standard 1: Monitoring and Accountability**

The Bridge Academy believes that there are a number of policies that we believe other districts should consider duplicated. Listed below are quick summaries of these programs. If contacted, The Bridge Academy will provide more detailed information.

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

**Reading Program**--Students are required to read throughout the school year. When a student finishes a book of their choosing from our library, they test on the book using the Accelerated Reader computer program. If they pass the book, they earn a certain number of points, depending on its length. Each student has a certain number of points they must earn during the year. If they do not reach their point’s goal, they must attend summer school! This program has drastically increased the number of students reading. Our student body of 262 passed over 4,000 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.

**Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction**

**Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) Period**--The high school has instituted a half-hour period every day to pull students for an 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.

**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), 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 on 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.”*

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Common Ground High School</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	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 2011-12, the school engaged in several curricular and instructional practices to boost student achievement on the state mastery test. Key curriculum and instructional practices utilized during 2011-12 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 academic 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. In addition to academic content standards, teachers identify the 21st century learning expectations and leadership standards that will be addressed in courses and opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of those standards through the coursework.

Students master these academic and leadership 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 Environmental Justice, they explore food insecurity in their communities and partner with community organizations to alleviate scarcity and promote healthy eating habits. 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.

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

All these learning opportunities build on lasting community partnerships. Because of these partnerships, we are able to offer our students both small-school support and big-school opportunities. We work with three local universities to bring 50+ mentors and 10+ professors to campus, and to create class-to-class partnerships with university courses. We send more than 30 of our students off site to participate in paid after-school job opportunities, linked to a 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 are.

In 2011-12, Common Ground expanded its tiered intervention system to reach our most struggling students with additional supports. In addition to providing after-school academic support and enrichment to more than one-third of our students, all students participated in twice-weekly, small-group academic support and enrichment sessions during the school day. Through Extended Academic Support and Enrichment (EASE), we are able to support a wide, broad spectrum of learners, ranging from remedial readers to students in AP/honors-level classes requiring more support. This individualized, flexible approach – matching struggling students with just-in-time individualized and small group instruction – yields real results.

**Common Ground (cont.)****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 presentations. Students must complete weekly writing assignments in all classes, including math, and teachers share responsibility for teaching non-fiction reading comprehension. Collaborative grading of benchmark assessments and common formative assessments help teachers to identify schoolwide teaching and learning issues.

***MISSION***

*“...will 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.”*

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Elm City College Preparatory School</b>		
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Andrew Poole, Principal Elementary School 407 James Street New Haven, CT 06513 Telephone: 203-772-7010 Grades: K-4	Rebecca Good, Principal Middle School 794 Dixwell Avenue New Haven, CT 06511 Telephone: 203-772-5332 Grades: 5-8	Chris Bostock, Principal High School 49 Prince Street New Haven, CT 06519 Telephone: 203-772-1092 Grades: 9-12

### BEST PRACTICES

#### Standard 3: Professional Development - District Partnerships

Elm City College Preparatory Academy (ECCP) is more than a great school — it is part of the Achievement First (AF) network of high-performing, public charter schools, and, as a result, under the guidance of AF’s Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships, ECCP is actively partnering with its host district, the New Haven Public Schools (NHPS), to learn together about what is working and how to increase student performance more broadly. In a 2004 report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, researchers found that successful school leadership plays a highly significant role in improving student learning, and that improving school leadership is a key to successful large-scale reform. In 2010, based on a shared belief that the effectiveness of school leaders is one of the top drivers of student achievement, ECCP and NHPS entered into a strategic partnership to train high-potential candidates to serve as turnaround principals for the district’s highest-need schools. The resulting Residency Program for School Leadership is a one-year training program that leverages best practices, from both the traditional and charter contexts, to combine experiential residencies, seminar-style learning and intense, individualized coaching in the areas of educational leadership.

Following a research-and-development year, the Residency Program officially launched in June 2011, with an inaugural cohort of five New Haven residents and three Hartford residents, who participated as emerging partners in the professional development opportunities offered through the Residency Program. Even as we continue to learn a great deal about the most effective design, structure and content for the program, we are encouraged by the successful launch and smooth operation of Year 1 (2011-12) of the Residency Program. In response to largely positive feedback from all involved and the key lessons that the Residency Program is already yielding about how charters and traditional districts can work together to translate and transfer best practices for the benefit of all students, we have undergone a three-city expansion, in 2012-13, in order to offer the Residency Program to high-potential candidates in each of AF’s three Connecticut host districts: New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport.

The Residency Program is guided by the following competency framework and core components, which combine coursework and clinical practice to give residents distinct experience in what they will do as school leaders: 1) pre-residency summer leadership development workshops focused on management and leadership; 2) two residencies and mentorships over the course of one academic year at a high-performing AF school and at a district school with a high-impact principal; 3) weekly academic-year seminars to provide training and practice in key areas of school leadership and to support residents in translating best practices to the school change context; 4) post-residency summer leadership development focused on district-specific school administration; and 5) ongoing professional development and support for program alumni. Residents from New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport will jointly participate as a single cohort in the Residency Program’s training and professional development, as well as conduct inter-visitations to each others’ schools across the three districts. As a result, the Residency Program will facilitate valuable knowledge and best practice sharing.

Ultimately, the Residency Program aims to yield improved student achievement at the district schools in which program alumni are placed as school leaders. Therefore, during 2012-13, we will pilot our alumni support for the five Year 1 residents from New Haven, including planning assistance in transitioning to school leadership, regular individualized coaching, and access to AF and NHPS professional development opportunities. All Residency Program alumni placed as principals in New Haven will receive biweekly coaching support, while all alumni placed as assistant principals in New Haven will receive monthly coaching support with the opportunity for increased support, should they transition into a principal position in a subsequent year. In order to increase capacity and support over the long term, AF will work with our host districts to build leadership development capacity and transition ownership of alumni coaching following the resident’s first year as a principal to district coaches.

We measure the success of the Residency Program using the following evaluation tools and metrics:

**Elm City College Preparatory School (cont.)**

- In partnership with each district, AF implements a robust recruitment and selection process to identify and jointly agree upon a number of highly qualified residents, based upon a scoring rubric aligned to the Residency Program for School Leadership Competency Model.
- We measure resident participation in and feedback on each of the core components of the Residency Program curriculum through surveys and interviews.
- As they progress through their residency year, residents complete a series of assessments designed to demonstrate content knowledge and clinical ability in the areas of educational leadership, aligned with the Residency Program for School Leadership Core Competency Framework, Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards and Connecticut State Department of Education Standards for School Leaders.
- At agreed upon intervals during the residency year, residents complete a self-assessment and receive formal feedback from their coach.
- Upon successful completion of the Residency Program, a diagnostic tool of school health is used to quantify changes in a school’s organizational capacity, under the leadership of Residency Program alumni, toward accelerating annual student academic growth.

The Residency Program represents a unique partnership to develop strong new leaders for district schools because of the close partnership and coordination between the entity responsible for training the new school leaders, ECCP, and the school district in which the leaders will be placed. Unlike many traditional principal preparation programs, this allows for the direct and explicit transfer and application of best practices from one education sector to another — in this case, from the charter to the traditional school district contexts.

***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.”*



<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Explorations Charter School</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Gail Srebnik, Executive Director Explorations Charter School The Brian J. O’Neil Building 71 Spencer Street Winsted, CT 06098 Telephone: 860-738-9070 Grades: 9-12

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Standard 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**

Explorations works each year to find the best tools to assess our students. We accept students from over 10 different school districts and we find that a transcript does not tell the entire story. It is not unusual for us to find a student who has 'credit' in a higher math class but cannot do what we consider to be basic mathematical operations. Therefore, we use a variety of valid and reliable assessments, which are free from cultural, racial and gender bias, to evaluate student performance.

Study Island online assessment and instruction program provides detailed reports for our staff. The information gained from these reports are evaluated first by a small data team and then shared with the entire staff. Scheduling changes are not uncommon and due to our relatively small size, we willingly will generate a new class for remedial help when needed. In addition, our high special education population is driven by IEPs that, once received by us, are able to make appropriate adjustments to schedules and classes. All IEPs have monitoring built into them. Staff is informed of needed accommodations and all special education students go through our assessment programs as well.

Study Island assessments are well designed and aligned with state standards (with a shift towards Common Core Standards in the near future). State standards are aligned with our curriculum and do drive instruction. In addition, we have our own developed assessments that are used in individual classes approximately every four weeks. Initially, we assess all incoming students at the start of the school year. We hold two-and-one-half days of orientation and, during that time, we have students assessed in reading, writing and mathematics.

We meet weekly for two hours after school and devote half the time to reviewing data that each staff member supplies on students they teach. This material is then synthesized and attention is focused on what modifications can be done to assist identified students. We currently use a handy flip chart from Mentoring Minds titled *Response to Intervention Strategies*. This material is divided into Tiers: Implementation, Academic and Behavioral. It includes suggestions for grouping for Instruction, Assessments, Learning Styles, Effective Instructional Practices and Differentiated Instruction.

Students are assigned advisers at the start of the school year. This adviser is responsible for contacting a student's home a minimum of twice a month. Parents are also encouraged to attend evening meetings at the school where information is provided on academic initiatives and other topics. We share information with students, in private, on how they are progressing. Often students will approach the principal for an update on their progress. Since we use an online grade-book, it is easy to provide accurate information fairly quickly.

Though our budget makes it difficult for us to hire 'experts' for professional development, we take advantage of as many 'free' offerings that we hear about at our local RESC and the SDE.

**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.”*



<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Highville Charter School</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Craig Drezek, 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.”*

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Integrated Day Charter School</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Anna James, Director Integrated Day Charter School (IDCS) 68 Thermos Avenue Norwich, CT 06360 Telephone: 860-892-1900 Grades: PK- 8

## BEST PRACTICES

### Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

#### Literacy Intervention Using a Push-in Model

The Literacy Intervention Push-in Model was expanded to increase reading achievement in kindergarten through sixth grade. The intent is to provide increased academic reading support to struggling readers. By utilizing this model, we decreased the amount of instructional time missed when a child is pulled out of class for academic support. We were able to provide targeted reading instruction aligned with classroom instruction. Last year was a transition year without the support of Reading First. For a five-year period, we utilized Reading First progress monitoring assessments and tracked the data through the assigned database. 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 six. Literacy tutors addressed this issue by creating student profile folders to track student progress. During 2010-11, we expanded our team to include Special Educators.

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

The practice was successful because teachers and literacy tutors were able to provide targeted reading instruction to struggling readers. Through cross grouping teachers we 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 and collaboration among literacy tutors, paraprofessionals and special education teachers. The changes occurred because the number of students needing intervention stayed constant, whereas the literacy support staff was reduced due to budget constraints. During Reading First we employed two literacy facilitators and three tutors, whereas this year we are only able to employ two part-time literacy tutors. The decrease in staff caused us to look at how to best utilize special education teachers, paraprofessionals and interns during intervention blocks.

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

#### Production Companies

Production Companies are multifaceted groups of students and facilitators who have come together, according to strengths and interests, to explore, over a period of time, a topic of interest. The exploration of a topic is student directed but the facilitator incorporates Dr. Howard Gardner's philosophy of Multiple Intelligences into the Production Company planning. While investigating a subject and its methodology, the group creates an application of its 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 and 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***

*“...is an alternative program which adheres to a developmental approach. Curricular content adheres to state and national standards, but the methods used will differ dramatically from the conventional classroom. The ID program appreciates and acknowledges that children pass through various stages on their journey to adulthood. The philosophy underlying the program recognizes that to be actively involved and truly engaged, a learner must have input into both the content of the learning as well as the process by which the knowledge is acquired. Education is viewed as a whole, a dynamic activity that extends beyond the classroom and the school and penetrates the world of the learner. To understand a subject fully, several subject areas must be incorporated, synthesized and investigated prior to the acquisition of true knowledge.”*

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Interdistrict School for the Arts and Communication</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Gina Fafard, 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**

At Interdistrict School for the Arts and Communication (ISAAC), character building and team building are key components to our curriculum. Students start every school day with their Crew, an advisory group of about 10 students and one or two teachers. Crew meetings can include CPR (Circle of Power and Respect), study skills and personal organization, character development and DIRT (Daily Independent Reading Time). In Crew, each student begins his or her day as part of a close-knit community, where activities are introduced to help them build character, empathy and respect. Our Crew teachers also work with our students on their post-high school success plans and help students monitor their academic progress.

Another regular practice at ISAAC is the integration of high levels of technology use in regular classroom instruction. When students are using technology as a tool or a support for communicating with others, they are highly engaged rather than just taking a passive role of recipient of information transmitted by a teacher or textbook. The student is actively making critical choices about how to generate, obtain, manipulate or display information. Moreover, when technology is used as a tool to support students in performing authentic tasks, the students are in the position of defining their goals, making design decisions and evaluating their progress. The teacher's role changes as well. The teacher is no longer the center of attention as the dispenser of information, but rather plays the role of facilitator, setting project goals and providing guidelines and resources, moving from student-to-student or group-to-group, providing suggestions and support for student activity. As students work on their technology-supported products, the teacher rotates through the room, looking over shoulders, asking about the reasons for various design choices and suggesting resources that might be used. An emphasis on project-based learning is another best practice at ISAAC. Such student learning is achieved through the completion of individual or group collaborative projects. These Learning Expeditions focus on critical thinking and problem solving with scenarios that affect our local community and environment. Examples of some of our Learning Expeditions include the mock Ocean Beach Closed Due to Pollution and The Thames River Valley Project. We annually showcase our student projects on Expedition Night in the Spring.

Our strong Visual Arts program has been one of the key components to the success of our Learning Expeditions. We practice arts integration in our core subject areas to help facilitate our student projects. With this approach, our students produce high-quality work that is content-based, meets standards and is recognized in the community. We offer both regular and Advanced Academy Visual Arts Classes. Every ISAAC student takes at least one trimester of visual arts a year.

A major component of ISAAC's commitment to continuous improvement is the administration's priority in scheduling to provide both Team and subject area meetings on a weekly basis. Student concerns and achievement data is the central issue in these meetings, as well as planning intervention programs for individuals and groups of students with similar needs. Also by creating this structure in the schedule, it allows parent meetings during the year in which all of the students' subject area teachers can attend.

Frequent classroom visits are part of our informal teacher supervision and support, and both the Executive Director and the Assistant Director spend time each day in classrooms collecting data, modeling good instructional practices and supporting the physical needs of the classroom. Our Formal Teacher Evaluation Plan requires certified staff to develop two Professional Goals each year. For the 2012-13 school year, teachers will be choosing goals that tie in with our new Expeditionary Learning school targets and Work Plan. These commitments to common approaches of schoolwide improvement speak well of the staff and its dedication to working together to improve the school.

In the spring of 2012, our Mission & Purpose I-BRIC made the recommendation that ISAAC return to its roots and realign itself with Expeditionary Learning (EL). The instructional staff, with backing from the Board of Directors, supported this decision. We began work in the summer of 2012 with the Expeditionary Learning School Designers, who will help us set up a school Work Plan for the year and defined goals that will support our Work Plan. One of the best practices is to build the capacity for teacher leadership in our school for purposes of peer coaching, curriculum support and data management. We have already begun Learning Walks to collect data on how we are doing with our first round of EL best practices implementation. We look forward to continued improvement in student achievement with the full implementation of this program.

**MISSION**

*"...ISAAC inspires excellence through the arts and project-based learning in a collaborative, multicultural community.*

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Jumoke Academy</b>		
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Michael M. Sharpe Chief Executive Director  Iris Gomero, Principal of Elementary School Jumoke Academy Charter School 250 Blue Hills Avenue Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-527-0575 Grades: PK-5	Justin Pistorius Principal of JAHSMaRT Jumoke Academy Honors Middle 339 Blue Hills Avenue Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-527-0575 x130 Grades: 6-9	Nichelle Woodson, Principal of JA-HC Jumoke Academy Honors at Hartford Conservatory 875 Asylum Avenue Hartford, CT 06112 Telephone: 860-837-1693

**BEST PRACTICES**

**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 2011-12 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 Connecticut Mastery Tests [CMTs] for reading) and 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 four to six 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.

Administrators and teachers conduct monthly academic review and schoolwide data team meetings, to analyze student data to improve student achievement and inform 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 grade level and 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 and 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 teachers 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, identifying resources, reviewing pacing guide and planning 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."*

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

### **BEST PRACTICES**

#### **Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment**

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

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

#### **Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction**

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

#### **MISSION**

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



<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Odyssey Community School</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Elaine Stancliffe, Executive Director Odyssey Community School 579 West Middle Turnpike Manchester, CT 06040 Telephone: 860-645-1234 Grades: K-8

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction**

**Exemplary Tier 1 Instruction and Targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 Remediation**

Odyssey has been implementing targeted remediation for years. Under the umbrella of Connecticut’s interpretation of Response To Intervention (RTI), 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 Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) scores.

We implement the SRBI model using our Student Assistance Team as the vehicle. We devote resources to this program through our operating budget, as well as our Title 1 grant. We funded two part-time, certified language arts teachers to provide additional support at the Tier 1 and Tier 2 level, and we employ a part-time RTI specialist to coordinate the delivery and assessment of interventions. Odyssey uses the strategies of either remediation or Tier 1, 2 or 3 SRBI, based on the needs of each student.

All students coming to Odyssey for the first time (all incoming kindergarteners as well as new students) are assessed over the summer using Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessments and AimsWeb universal screening assessments for math. Under the guidance of our Special Education Lead Teacher, classroom teachers analyze data from the summer, as well as the 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, AimsWeb 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 AimsWeb which they have not mastered, or if they are reading below grade level on the Fountas & Pinnell assessment. Students are identified for SRBI on the basis of low CMT or AimsWeb scores, Fountas & Pinnell 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 building principals and lead teachers. Progress monitoring takes place frequently, with a decision at the end of eight to 10 weeks as to the efficacy of the interventions, and whether more intensive interventions are indicated. Generally, progress monitoring takes the form of AimsWeb assessments.

Tier 2 interventions take place in smaller groups (three to four students) outside of regular academic classes, and are delivered by tutors and certified staff members under the guidance of the Special Education Lead Teacher. Progress monitoring takes place frequently, with a decision at the end of eight to 10 weeks as to the efficacy of the interventions, and whether more intensive interventions are indicated. Again, progress monitoring generally takes the form of customized AimsWeb tests.

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

Parents are informed by letter when their children are identified for either remediation or SRBI interventions.

We found this program of targeted remediation to be successful in large part because we devoted monetary and personnel resources to deliver the remediation and/or SRBI, and to progress monitor over time.

In 2011–12 we funded a full-time Literacy Specialist. In 2012-13, we will also hire a part-time Math Specialist. Both of these positions will administer and oversee our SRBI programs; we will retain our current staff that delivers instruction and assessment, and we will also fund a full-time SRBI interventionist to work with classroom teachers and to deliver direct instruction in literacy and math skills to ensure that all Odyssey students are achieving at expected levels.

**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.”*

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

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction**

This was the first full year implementing a new, comprehensive language arts curriculum, aligned with the Common Core Standards, the Grade Level Expectations and the strands of Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMTs). In the past year, we have completed most of the new math curriculum, as well. We have also made significant progress in developing our science curriculum.

The curriculum being implemented this year employed research-based teaching practices guided and supported by ongoing, weekly professional development, something begun during the prior year. Common formative assessments were administered to monitor students' progress and inform instructional practices. Teachers continued to receive training in data team facilitation in order to evaluate students' performance most effectively and better inform their instructional practices.

**Indicators of Best Practices**

- In collaboration with Cooperative Educational Services (CES), our teachers received ongoing training in data team facilitation, enabling them to use student data to inform their instruction more effectively.
- Throughout the course of the past year, all of our teachers received training in content area reading instruction from a consultant who specializes in that area as a professor at Sacred Heart University's School of Education.
- Another college professor from Marymount College's School of Education provided our language arts teachers with ongoing training in developing a readers and writers workshop model of instruction.
- Students had 120 minutes a day of instruction in language arts and 120 minutes in math, as well. In addition, social studies and science teachers continued to devote at least one period per week on strategies and skills in reading in their respective content areas.
- Our Independent Reading and Accelerated Math programs have enabled us to customize instruction and learning to meet students' individual needs.
- We continued to expand the use of technology across all curriculum areas.
- We continued to work with the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) to help us complete our comprehensive policies manual.
- Lead Teachers continued to mentor and support their colleagues in language arts and math to ensure that best practices were being employed uniformly and effectively.

**MISSION**

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



<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Side By Side Charter School</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Matthew Nittoly, Director Side By Side Charter School 10 Chestnut Street South Norwalk, CT 06854 Telephone: 203-857-0306 Grades: PK-8

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Standard 3: Professional Development**

Much of the emphasis on instruction and assessment at Side by Side has recently evolved based on the teachings and trainings of the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI), including, but not limited to, a curricular transition to the Common Core State Standards. Because of the school structure, which is one class per grade level, and one teacher per discipline in the middle grades, coupled with the significant changes to teaching & learning brought about by the shift to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the upcoming Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessment system, Side By Side felt that the 2011-12 school year was a time to reevaluate and restructure our teacher’s professional development system. As a result, based on the indicators outlined in the Professional Development (PD) standard, what follows is our revised professional development model that was piloted in 2011-12, and will be implemented as our formal professional development model beginning in the 2012-13.

During the 2011-12 school year, a PD model was created and implemented to better fit the unique structure of Side by Side. Rather than to amend our program to accommodate a more traditional approach to PD, we adopted a more individualized approach, differing for each teacher.

First, in collaboration with administration, teachers created personal growth plans in a self-chosen area of expertise. Through this plan, the teacher and Director researched and developed an action plan for PD opportunities to participate in. The ultimate goal is to create a community of teacher experts whose expertise can be implemented into all areas of school planning and collaboration. Below is a more detailed explanation of this plan, including examples:

**An individualized professional development plan**

- Is a means to work with others to further the educator’s vision and goal and affect student learning;
- Addresses the needs of the individual educator by enhancing his or her knowledge/skills and thus the quality of student learning;
- Addresses two or more of the educator standards;
- Encourages educators to think outside the box; and
- May include school initiatives.

**Process for Teachers to prepare/write their Plan**

**A) SELF-REFLECTION**

Teacher reflects on one area of strength/ expertise and one area within which they struggle.

**B) WRITING THE PLAN: COMPONENTS**

1. Description of the Goal(s) to Be Addressed

For example:

1. I wish to become a building resource in the area of elementary mathematics in order to enhance the differentiation and intervention plans created in data teams. 2. I wish to improve my ability to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners in Tier I reading classes.

2. Rationale for Your Goal(s) and Link to Self-Reflection, Educational Situation and Professional Standard(s)

**Side By Side Community School (cont.)**

3. Plan for Assessing and Documenting Achievement of Your Goal(s)

4. Plan to Meet Your Goal(s): Objectives, Activities (PD) and Timeline, and Collaboration

**Date goals submitted to the Director:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date goals approved/not approved by the Director:** \_\_\_\_\_

C) IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Sample of one component to an individual’s PD plan-

Activities	Timeline	Collaboration	Completion Date
Professional development workshop with Haskins; Literacy How, Inc.	October 2011	Discussing areas of concern with Haskins literacy coach	Workshop completed 10/11

Below is a true example of the full list of areas chosen for individual PD for the 2011-12 school year at Side by Side. Each teacher will continue with his/her plan in 2012-13 to further develop as the “expert” in his/her designated area.

Exceptional Learners

- I. Lower School Math Intervention: Teacher A
- II. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL): Teacher B
- III. Multi-sensory Literacy Instruction: Teacher C

General instruction and assessment

- I. Technology Integration: Teacher D
- II. Standards-based Grading: Teacher E
- III. Project-based Learning: Teacher F
- IV. Math
  - A. Expressive Language in math: Teacher G
  - B. Math integration across the curriculum: Teacher H
- V. Reading
  - A. Literacy Intervention: Teacher I
- VI. Social Studies Integration: Teacher J

School climate and culture

- I. Problem-resistant Behavior: School social worker
- II. Social Justice Resources: Teacher K
- III. Parent Involvement: Teacher L
- IV. Teacher Leadership: Teacher M

**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.”*

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Stamford Academy</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	David Williams, Director Stamford Academy 229 North Street Stamford, CT 06092 Telephone: 203-324-6300 Grades: 9-12

## **BEST PRACTICES**

### **Standard 3: Professional Development**

**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 Director of Curriculum on a variety of topics, including lesson plans, classroom management and other teaching techniques. In addition, the Director of Curriculum 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.

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

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

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

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

## **MISSION**

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

<b>School Name:</b>	<b>Trailblazers Academy</b>
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Craig Baker, Chief Education Officer Trailblazers Academy P.O. Box 359 Stamford, CT 06904 Telephone: 203-977-5690 Grades: 6-8

## 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 2010-11, staff was trained in rubrics and looking at student work. In the 2010-11 school year, teachers met weekly for data team meetings to analyze discrete data on student achievement on specific grade-level expectations. Data teams met weekly for 60 minutes, with rotating content areas so that each content area was addressed every four weeks (math, science, English and social studies), allowing the weeks in between content focus to change instruction and target students not making gains and also formatively assess the students again and analyze the data from the assessments.

#### Weekly Curricular Supervision Meetings

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

### Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

During the eight-hour school day, the teachers at Trailblazers Academy each devote six-and-a-half hours of the day to classroom instruction. The school has two special education teachers who co-teach on a rotating schedule in every classroom over the course of each week to service the high number of students with individualized education programs (IEPs). Students with IEPs are rarely pulled out of the general education classrooms as we believe that inclusive learning environments respect the wide diversity of our students and promotes their ability to learn from each other. Classes at Trailblazers Academy are highly differentiated to address

the personal needs of the students, and teachers document differentiation in their daily lesson plans, which are reviewed weekly by the co-directors.

In the 2011-12 school year, Dr. Emerson-Pace held weekly professional development sessions that addressed strategies and teacher behaviors that promote intrinsic motivation in students, addressing their feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness in the classroom. Dr. Emerson-Pace focused these sessions on building teachers' knowledge base and skill level in designing and implementing instruction that both encouraged students to have a highly active role in their own learning, but also to allow all students, regardless of ability and background, to experience success in the classroom.

In the 2011-12 school year, the teachers and school leadership, in collaboration, rewrote the entire school curriculum to focus on Common Core Standards. During this revision, the curriculum maintained a connection to the larger school community learning goals of making connections to the world beyond the school walls and to interdisciplinary opportunities. Each unit in the school curriculum, regardless of grade or content area, is connected to another unit the students are simultaneously studying. For example, when the 7<sup>th</sup>-grade students are studying 2-D and 3-D coordinate graphing, they are studying 3-dimensional vectors and tessellations in art; when the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students are studying Middle East oil politics in social studies, the students are reading Middle Eastern authors in English Language Arts.

The curriculum identifies specific and measurable learning expectations for each unit in each grade. These learning expectations become the foundation for instructional daily objectives and can be measured on a daily basis through common formative assessments. Each unit in a specific course in a specific grade scaffolds skills and knowledge throughout the course of the unit, and each subsequent unit throughout the year in any subject area builds on the previous unit's knowledge and skill development on a continuum. This skill and knowledge continuum also works vertically as the curriculum for each content area (e.g., mathematics) relies on the previous grade's learning to develop enduring understandings that build as students become better critical thinkers and information analysts over the course of three years at Trailblazers Academy.

Best practices in Readers Workshop and Writers Workshop encourage the teachers to daily confer with students to provide targeted instruction and support that build students' individual skills, based on their unique needs. This model supports, not replaces, whole-class instruction. Teachers keep running records of student progress and use that data in data teams to evaluate weekly progress of students. Additionally, these teaching practices are used in all classes, not just in language arts and literacy classes.

Classroom observations at Trailblazers Academy are performed using a metric developed using the Common Core of Teaching. Dr. Emerson-Pace conducts a minimum of four clinical classroom observations on every teacher each year. These observations become a part of yearlong evaluation procedures for the teachers and provide the foundation for identifying teacher professional development needs. Additionally, each teacher has a personal growth and development plan that is tied to overarching school targets and their own development needs and goals for each school year. Dr. Emerson-Pace further identifies schoolwide professional development needs and provides that development for the teachers in weekly hour-long faculty meetings every Friday throughout the school year. Additionally, every teacher meets weekly with one of the co-directors for a supervision meeting where needs and supports are identified and addressed.

Curriculum improvement and development is an ongoing and persistent process at Trailblazers Academy. In addition to the most recent curriculum revisions for the Common Core Standards, the school has a systematic procedure for curriculum review that involves both teacher input during supervisions, but schoolwide curriculum audits with the entire teaching faculty. Curriculum is consistently refined to reflect changes in technology and changes in the demographic background of the school's students.

### **Standard 3: Professional Development**

In the 2011-12 school year, the school utilized the services of Cooperative Educational Services (CES) to provide professional development in the areas of differentiated instruction, culturally responsive education, and addressing English Language Learners at the overwhelming request of the faculty. The knowledge they gained from these sessions informed their curriculum recommendations as the school worked to rewrite the curriculum over the past year.

### ***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."*