

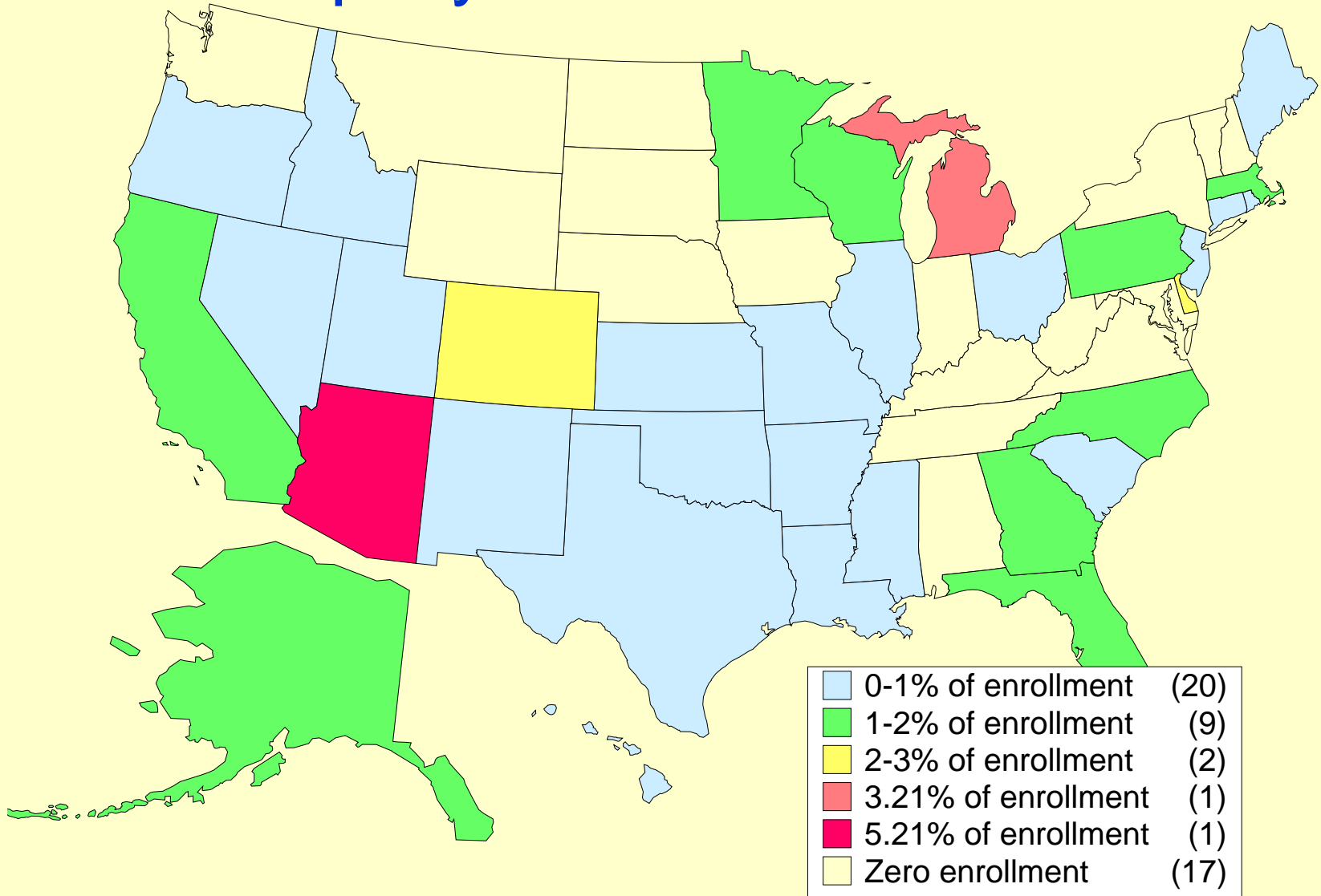
# Charter Schools Are Tuition-Free, Non-Selective Public Schools That Operate With Greater Autonomy – And More Accountability – Than Regular Public Schools

“A public charter school is a publicly funded school that, in accordance with an enabling state statute, has been granted a charter exempting it from selected state or local rules and regulations.

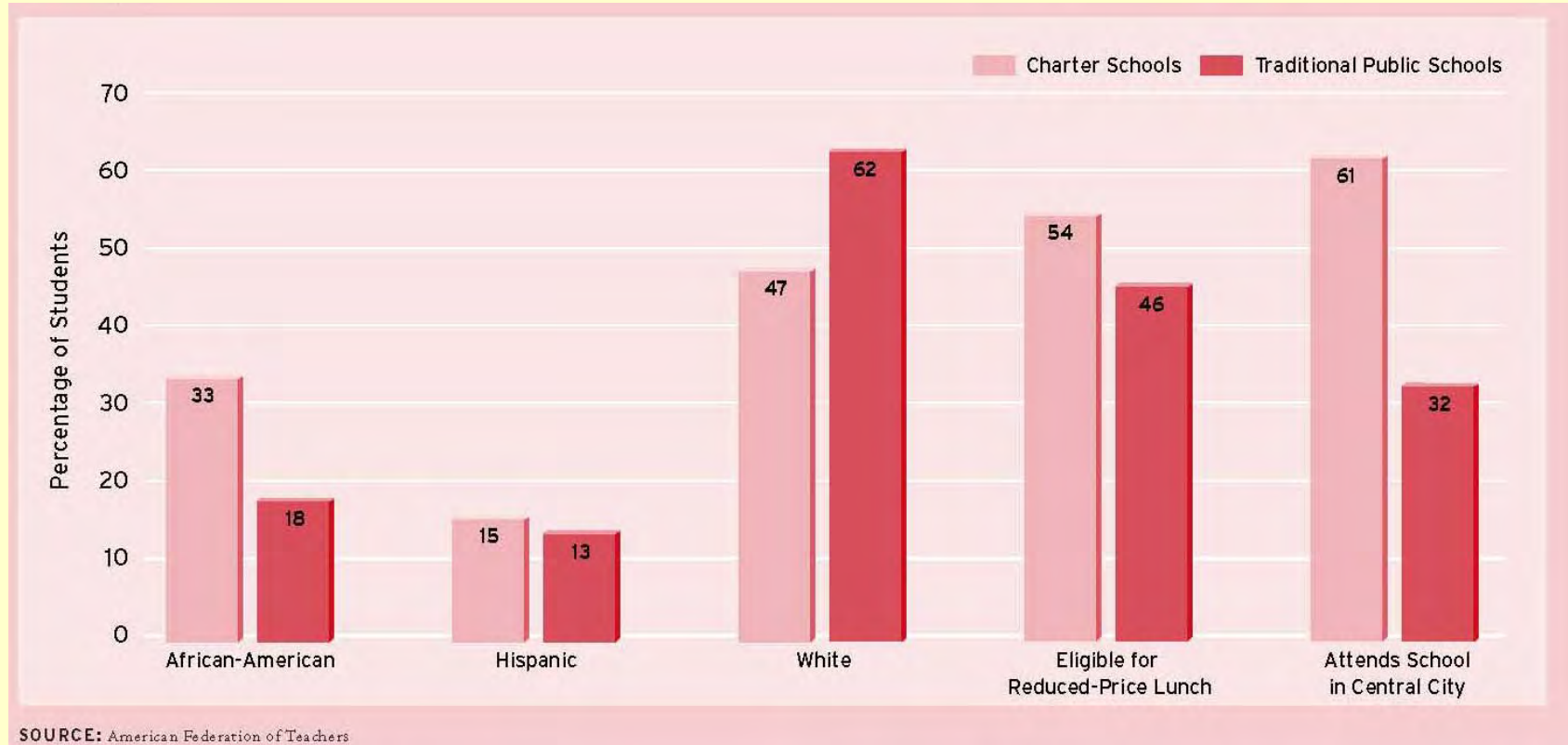
A charter school may be newly created, or it may previously have been a public or private school; it is typically governed by a group or organization (e.g., a group of educators, a corporation, or a university) under a contract or charter with the state.

In return for funding and autonomy, the charter school must meet accountability standards. A school's charter is reviewed (typically every 3 to 5 years) and can be revoked if guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed or the standards are not met.”

# Charter Schools Are Spreading Rapidly Across the Nation



# Charter Schools Typically Serve the Most Disadvantaged, “At Risk” Children

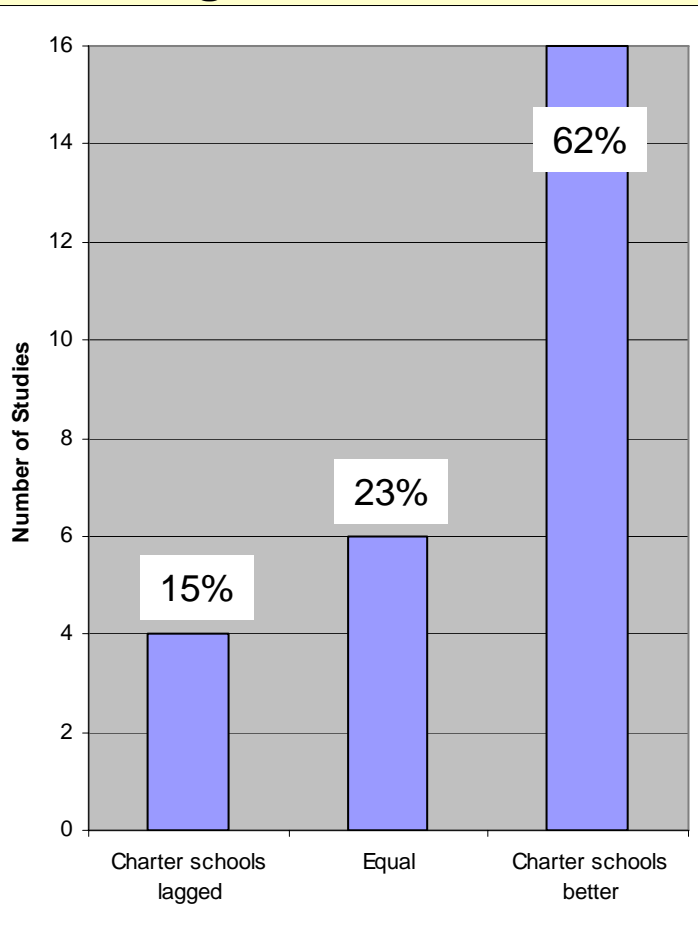


Contrary to popular perception, charter schools do not “cream” the best students. Charter school students performed worse, relative to their fellow students, when they were in regular schools *prior* to attending charter schools.

-- 4.5 NPR points worse in reading and 6.7 points worse in math

# Despite Taking the Most Difficult Students, Most Studies Show That Charter School Students Are Making Greater Gains Than Comparable Students in Nearby Public Schools

## Analysis of 26 Studies That Compared Student Progress Over Time



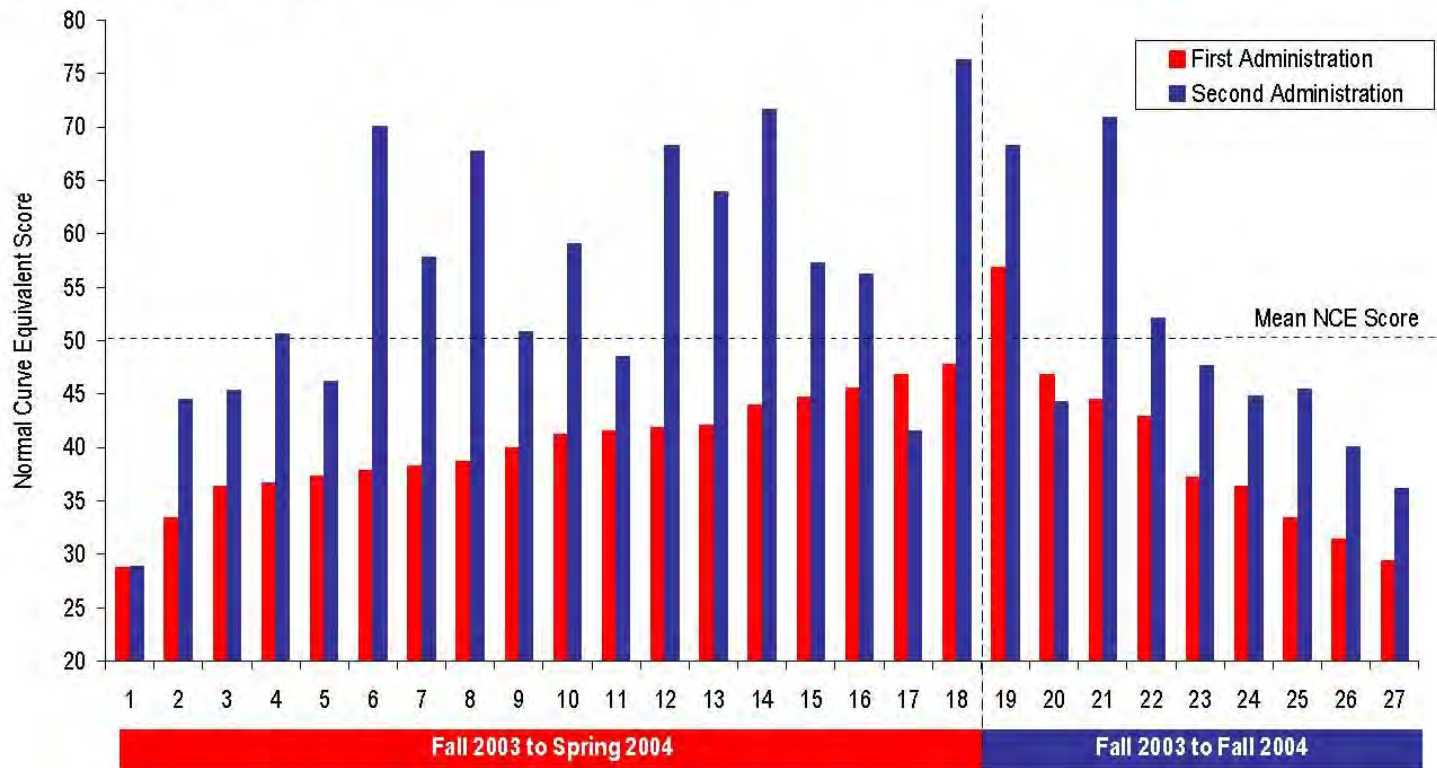
### But what about the studies that appear to show that charter schools are underperforming?

- Charter school students do indeed have lower test scores than regular public schools (according to 12 of 18 “snapshot” studies), but that’s because they serve higher concentrations of disadvantaged, “at risk” students. The gold standard is to measure student progress *over time*
- The snapshot studies failed to adequately adjust for critical factors such as household income and parents’ education and marital status
- The 2003 data used for these studies included only 5% of all charter schools
- University of Washington researcher Mary Beth Celio’s dismissed the widely publicized 2004 study as “one of the most unsophisticated, low-level analyses I’ve ever seen.”
- The editorial board at the *Chicago Tribune* deemed the findings “about as new as a lava lamp, as revelatory as an old sock, and as significant as a belch.”

# The KIPP Charter Schools – More Than 50 Nationwide – Are Showing What Low-Income Minority Students Can Achieve

The red bars are the test scores when students first enter KIPP schools; the blue bars are the scores the following Spring or Fall

Figure 3. KIPP Mathematics Normal Curve Equivalent Scores for the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade on the Stanford Achievement Test by School, 2003-04



NOTE: Three KIPP schools administered SAT 9/10 tests in both spring and fall 2004, thus summing 27 indicators from 24 schools.

# KIPP Schools Share a Core Set of Operating Principles Known as the Five Pillars

There Is No Reason Why *Every* School Couldn't Adopt These Five Pillars

1. **High Expectations**. KIPP Schools have clearly defined and measurable high expectations for academic achievement and conduct that make no excuses based on the students' backgrounds. Students, parents, teachers, and staff create and reinforce a culture of achievement and support through a range of formal and informal rewards and consequences for academic performance and behavior.
2. **Choice & Commitment**. Students, their parents, and the faculty of each KIPP School choose to participate in the program. No one is assigned or forced to attend these schools. Everyone must make and uphold a commitment to the school and to each other to put in the time and effort required to achieve success.
3. **More Time**. KIPP Schools know that there are no shortcuts when it comes to success in academics and life. With an extended school day, week, and year, students have more time in the classroom to acquire the academic knowledge and skills that will prepare them for competitive high schools and colleges, as well as more opportunities to engage in diverse extracurricular experiences.
4. **Power to Lead**. The principals of KIPP Schools are effective academic and organizational leaders who understand that great schools require great School Leaders. They have control over their school budget and personnel. They are free to swiftly move dollars or make staffing changes, allowing them maximum effectiveness in helping students learn.
5. **Focus on Results**. KIPP Schools relentlessly focus on high student performance on standardized tests and other objective measures. Just as there are no shortcuts, there are no excuses. Students are expected to achieve a level of academic performance that will enable them to succeed at the nation's best high schools and colleges.

# Another Case-Study of Gap-Closing Performance: Amistad Academy

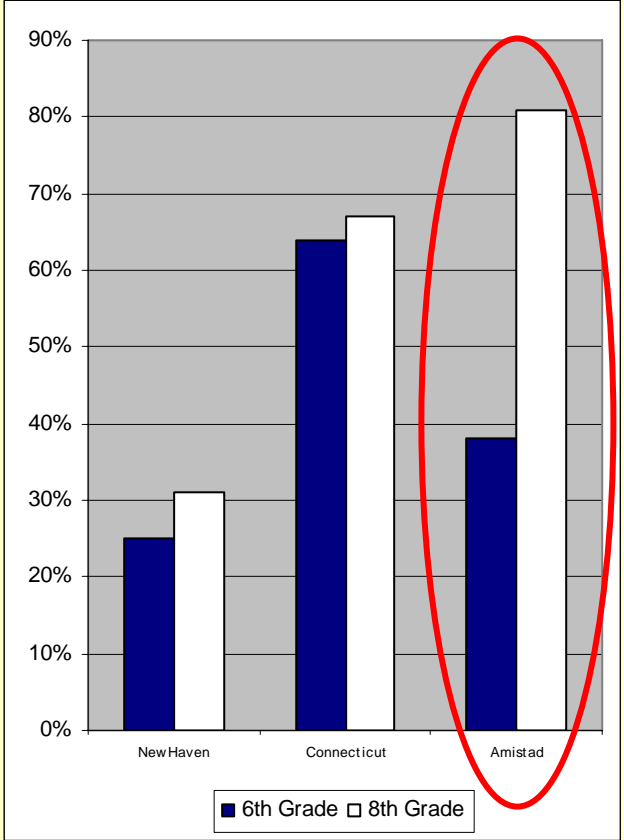
- 97% Black and Latino students
- Selected by lottery from the City of New Haven
- 84% free or reduced price lunch
- 246 students in grades 5-8
- 10% Special Education
- 100% participation on Connecticut Mastery Test
- On average, incoming fifth graders are two years below grade level in reading and math, according to baseline tests.



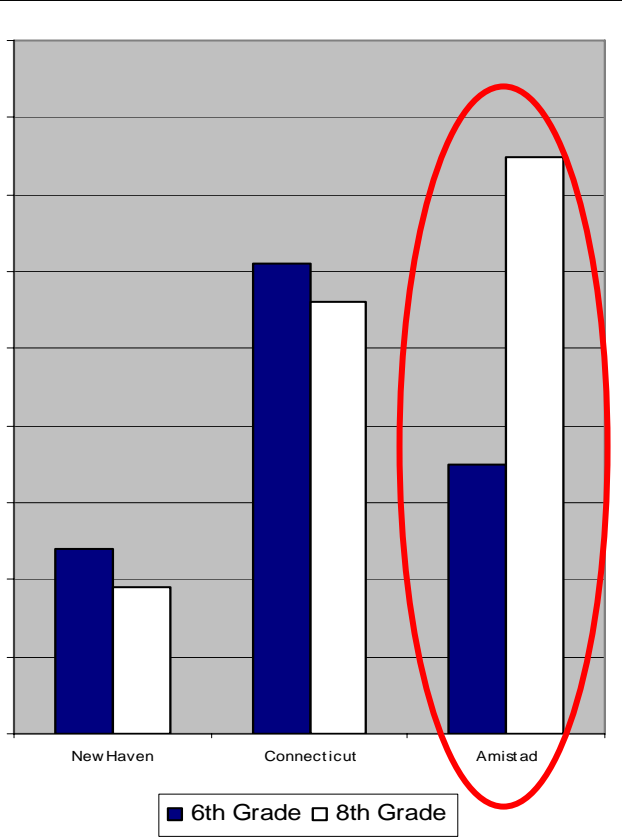
# Amistad Is Achieving Extraordinary Success

And Is Spending Less: \$10,700/Student vs. More Than \$12,000 New Haven Average

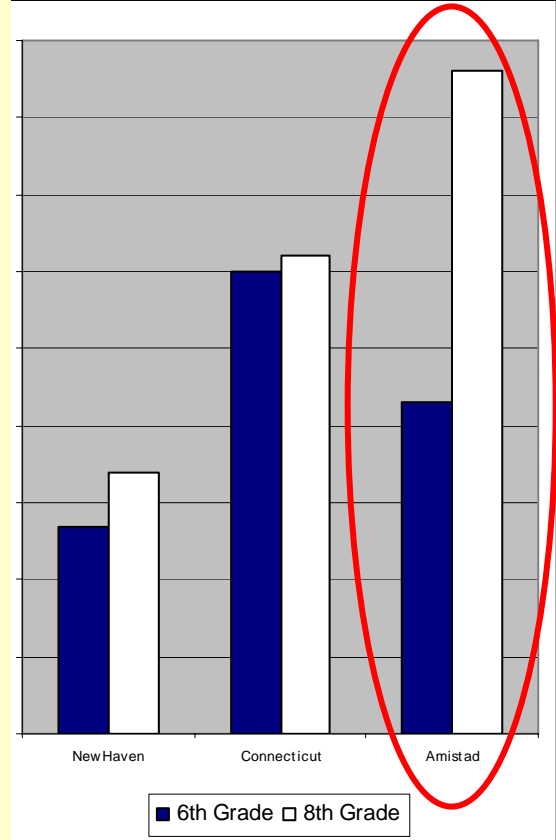
**Reading (% at Mastery)**



**Math**



**Writing**



# Amistad's "12 Lessons About School Reform"

1. **"These Kids" CAN Learn.** Amistad Academy's students, who are 98 percent African-American or Latino and 84-percent free/reduced lunch, outperformed the Connecticut state average in every subject tested. Since Amistad's students were selected by a blind lottery run by the New Haven Public Schools and the school has a higher percentage of poor and minority students than the district as a whole, the argument that poor, minority students cannot achieve seems clearly false. Our measure of success will never be to do just a little bit better or to compare ourselves only to other schools serving poor, minority students. We are not interested in reducing the achievement gap; we want to close it. Every Achievement First school will be expected to raise student achievement to at least the state average within three years, and each AF school will be expected to have 90 percent of all students who have been at the school for five or more years at or above the proficiency level in all tested subjects. These will always be our most important metrics. All Achievement First schools will also be unapologetically college preparatory.
2. **Leadership Matters – Mightily.** Great leadership at the school site is the most vital variable for institutional success [so] Achievement First will aggressively recruit the finest educational professionals to lead its schools. As Achievement First grows, we will consciously and systematically groom our best teachers to assume leadership roles, providing them with the finest training in the nation.
3. **Teachers Are More Important Than Curricula...** In the past 50 years, policymakers and superintendents have tried (in vain) to fix American education by changing curricula and programs. The result has been wave after wave of educational fads and a lack of attention on who is in front of the classroom. Unfortunately, all of this often misguided energy around program has obfuscated a dirty little secret in American education: the teachers in front of the student aren't always good enough. The number one predictor of student achievement is teacher quality. The message is clear: Get great teachers in front of students, and they will have great results. What does this mean for Achievement First? Achievement First will aggressively recruit some of the finest teachers in America. We have already developed a rigorous recruiting process..., a comprehensive plan for casting a wide net to increase the candidate pool, and a two-year professional development program to rapidly accelerate the skills of rookie and early-career educators.

# Amistad's "12 Lessons About School Reform" (2)

4. **...But Some Curricula Are Better Than Others.** There is a remarkable similarity among the curricular of the schools that have closed the achievement gap are in terms of curriculum. All are intensely standards-based, taking away the endless debate about what is taught, an ceaseless discussion that cripples most schools. We have done extensive research to find the best curricula, visiting high-performing schools, talking to experts and curriculum reps, and reading the research literature. Through the process, we have picked or developed curricula that have a proven track record of producing dramatic student achievement. We do not believe in taking chances with children's futures; instead, we have picked the best curricula, and we will invest extensively in the professional development of our teachers so that they know these curricula well. A great curriculum combined with the knowledge and skill of a master teacher is a winning combination.
5. **"Mere Mortals" not "Superhumans".** We also recognize that almost all of the high-performing charter schools, including Amistad Academy, have relied on one or more "heroic leaders" who combine an incredible 75-plus-hour-a-week work ethic and a charismatic leadership style. Achievement First does not believe that a "heroic leader" is necessary in every school. In fact, we think that "heroic leaders" are not usually the best leaders for long-term, systematic change. We do believe that a strong, passionate, talented leader is necessary at each school unit, but we also believe that, in the past, "heroic leaders" at great urban schools had to be heroic to succeed because their schools did not have the necessary supports. Achievement First's model focuses on finding and training great instructional leaders; surrounding them with dedicated, talented teachers; giving these leaders and teachers a strong, proven school-based model to implement; and providing strong "back office" support so that the teachers and leaders can focus on student achievement. This "back office" support takes two forms: school unit and central office.
6. **An Unwavering Focus on Student Achievement.** Before No Child Left Behind, the discussion about equity in schools most often focused on inputs: per pupil funding, class size, student to teacher ratios and others. The urban schools that have closed the achievement gap have all spent the same or less than their host districts and almost always have larger class sizes and less experienced teachers than the other schools in the city where they are located. However, by focusing exclusively on one output, student achievement, these schools have test scores that often double or triple the average scores of other students in the district. Our name, Achievement First, was consciously selected to constantly reinforce our unwavering focus on producing dramatic, life-changing student achievement, chiefly as measured by statewide, criterion-referenced tests. Furthermore, the entire focus of Achievement First teachers and leaders will be on outputs. Each school will create a "Yearly School Report Card" that highlights key output metrics, which will be mailed to all parents and posted on the Achievement First website.

# Amistad's "12 Lessons About School Reform" (3)

7. **Interim Assessments and the Strategic Use of Data**. Achievement First realizes that schools that thrive are those that live their data. Achievement First has developed scope and sequences that clearly outline what standards are to be taught when. Teachers at Achievement First schools are empowered by data; knowing clearly their students strengths and weaknesses, Achievement First teachers pick the best strategies to ensure that *every* student masters the material.
8. **One Hundred 1% Solutions**. School reform efforts in the past have focused on finding the "magic bullet" that will fix the schools. Whether the holy grail was reduced class size, a specific curriculum or increased teacher pay, schools have gone from fad to fad, each time believing that the latest solution was the magic answer. What the high-performing urban schools realize is that it takes all of the following (and more) to close the achievement gap: solid leadership, talented teachers, structured curriculum, effective policies, targeted professional development, no-nonsense school culture, parent engagement, and smooth systems. Brett Peiser, the achievement-oriented principal of South Boston Harbor Academy, says, "There is no 100 percent solution to creating a great school. At South Boston, we have 100 one percent solutions."
9. **Serve ALL Urban Kids**. Building on the strong legacy of Amistad Academy, Achievement First schools will locate all of its schools in high poverty areas with a history of low student performance and will commit to serving the same student population as the host district. Our schools also commit themselves to firm policies against expulsion except in the most extreme cases. Publicizing for student admission will be equal across the entire school catchment area (the entire city for New Haven schools and large swaths of a borough for New York City schools). Achievement First schools will also have 100 percent of students take the state tests each year, and unlike other public schools, we will publicize attrition rates clearly so as not to inflate achievement scores or graduation rates.

# Amistad's "12 Lessons About School Reform" (4)

10. **Sweat the Small Stuff.** Walk into one of the few great urban schools in America and there is a palpable, immediately noticeable difference from the chaos, disrespect, and disorder that mar the typical urban school. We reject the dominant paradigm - pick your battles and don't worry about the "small stuff", such as rolling eyes, untucked shirts, or leaning back in chairs. Our schools set extraordinarily high expectations for student behavior, and they are relentless in ensuring that students live up to these expectations. Achievement First recognizes that dramatic academic achievement can only occur in schools with a no-nonsense, structured, positive, achievement-oriented, college-focused environment. Because their teachers are persistent, insistent, and consistent, students' behavior rises to the high expectations.
11. **Fidelity to a Clear, Successful Model is Important.** When Alan Bersin became superintendent in San Diego, he found a district with over 50 reading and math programs and a professional development system characterized by "drive by" sessions in which a guru or external expert would impart his or her educational views without any connection to the curriculum in use or assessment standards. Such fragmentation makes it impossible to drive systemic reform, and Bersin quickly moved toward having common curricula and providing teacher coaches well-versed in the curricula and standards. Achievement First will not be a loose network of schools, each interpreting a broad set of standards in its own way. Curricula, systems, and school culture approaches will be very similar across the schools. Each teacher new to Achievement First will go through a two-year sequence of professional development activities designed to have them fully understand the mission, vision, and values of Achievement First and become master teachers of the Achievement First curriculum.
12. **Flywheel v. Doom Loop.** In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins contrasts the culture of discipline inside truly great organizations with those of struggling competitors. The highly successful companies found a "hedgehog concept" - what they could be the best in the world at - and they slowly, methodically built their business around this concept, gaining momentum each year. The pattern within these companies creates sustained excellence: steps forward consistent with hedgehog concept, accumulation of visible results, personnel energized by results, flywheel builds momentum, steps forward consistent with the hedgehog concept. In contrast, the companies with chronically poor results were caught in devastating "doom loops" that were characterized by a familiar yet highly destructive pattern: disappointing results, reaction without understanding, new direction/program/leader/event/fad, no accumulated momentum, disappointing results. Achievement First will avoid this "doom loop" by sticking to our "hedgehog concept" - our clear school model. Instead of lurching toward new programs, we will continually tweak and improve (not replace) our systems and develop in our people the ability to consistently use our model to produce great results. Instead of looking to "savior leaders" from the outside to run our schools, we will rely on leaders steeped in how to effectively implement our school model.