



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Achievement First - Crown Heights School**

**790 East New York Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 10007**

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Orpheus Williams**

**Dates of review: April 16, 2007  
Reviewer: Georgie Beasley and Aamir Raza**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Achievement First – Crown Heights Charter School has 423 students enrolled from kindergarten through grade 2 in the elementary school academy, and grade 5 through grade 6 in the middle school academy. It is reaching its targets each year to build to full enrollment and to cater to students in kindergarten through grade 12

The school's population currently comprises 97% Black and 3% Latino students. There are no English language learners at the school, far lower than similar and City schools. The proportion of special education students, at 6.8%, is lower than typically found in similar and City schools. Few students leave the school at times other than graduation.

The school receives Title 1 funding. At 98%, attendance is far higher than similar schools and City averages.

Students' performance is improving each year in English language arts and mathematics. Test results are broadly similar to City schools and slightly above schools with the same demographic make-up.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- An effective data-driven improvement model is established across the school.
- The school motivates everyone to do their best, including support staff, parents, students and teachers.
- There is good emphasis placed on students' personal development and so they make regular and positive contributions to school life.
- Students' knowledge, understanding and skills in literacy and mathematics are developed particularly well, including their use across the curriculum.
- Clear and determined leadership from both principals results in an established vision and a purposeful learning environment.
- High expectations for student academic and personal achievement are articulated and communicated clearly to staff, students and parents.
- Established informal systems are in place to evaluate and review the school's work and to reflect on classroom practice.
- Interim assessment data is used constantly and continuously to adjust programs and realign the curriculum and instruction.
- Mutual respect and strong relationships ensure everyone treats each other politely and considerately.
- The school has created an effective learning environment that is focused on meeting the needs of all students.
- Adequate internal controls and segregated staff functions are in place.
- The board and school leader have comprehensive and clearly outlined fiscal policies.
- Parents are highly satisfied with the school and see strong potential in the school.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to strengthen the analysis of assessment data by disaggregating further by ethnic and gender groupings by class, grade and subject in order to identify any emerging trends in student performance and progress.
- Use data to specify measures in goal setting that link even more precisely to students' actual and expected performance.
- Formally record the school's strategic plan and action plans that detail how the school intends to reach its long-term and interim goals.
- Formalize systems for using the school's extensive interim assessment data and goals to monitor, evaluate and review its work and effectiveness.

- Look at ways to differentiate instruction within classes, especially in planning further challenge for potentially higher achieving students.
- Build more regular opportunities into the curriculum for students to use technology to support their learning.
- The school needs to keep up with the re-approval of fingerprinting related conditional appointments.
- Tag DYCD funded assets as “property of DYCD.”

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

Achievement First Crown Heights Charter School puts children’s achievement at the top of its agenda, a significant aspect in the principals’ shared vision for the school. They have worked successfully together to build a purposeful learning environment and a strong commitment from staff, parents and students to each and every individual’s growth. Particularly good emphasis is given to students’ social and emotional development and to their literacy and mathematical skills. As a result, they are well-prepared for the challenges presented in their day-to-day personal lives and their drive to meet the schools’ high academic expectations.

The school has accumulated a significant range of data which it uses effectively to guide its work. As one staff member said, ‘This is truly a data driven school’ in recognition that data drives the work of all members of the school community.

The school is clear about its priorities for improvement but has yet to formally record these in a long-term strategic plan that details precisely how it intends to reach its goals. The capacity to succeed is good and so the school is well placed to continue to drive forward improvements.

### How well the school meets New York City’s evaluation criteria

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.**

**This area of the school’s work is well developed.**

The school has an extensive range of assessment data which is very well organized to enable administration and teachers to gain a quick overview of what each student knows and can do by class, grade and subject. The information is analyzed closely to note any trends in performance of Black and Hispanic student groupings. The school does not yet disaggregate the data into smaller groupings, for example, to determine how well Black American girls perform in comparison to their Caribbean classmates. In addition, while the school is clear about any differences in performance of girls and boys, it does not yet use the information to make comparisons across subjects. For example, to note whether girls

do better in literacy than they do in mathematics and boys better in mathematics than they do in literacy.

The school tracks individual student progress particularly well and so knows precisely each student's growth throughout the year in reading, writing, mathematics and to some extent science and social studies. This good analysis ensures the needs of special education students and those at risk of not reaching grade standards are met especially well. Regular assessments ensure the information is up to date and enables teachers to adjust groupings in class and plan learning that fills any identified gaps in individual student's knowledge, understanding and skills.

The school makes extensive comparisons of how well it is doing in tested subjects with other district and City schools, and its performance, attendance and parent satisfaction with other Achievement First Charter schools. It analyzes closely annual improvements in student progress and performance by class and grade in reading, writing and mathematics across the school and in science and social studies in the middle school to gain a secure view of its year on year improvement.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school uses data well to set measurable and objective long-term and interim goals for improving student performance and accelerating progress in literacy, mathematics, science and social studies. In addition it has clear goals for students' personal development, established through its REACH program, which focuses on systematically developing the character values of respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship and hard work. The school faculty meets regularly to discuss and plan action as to how to achieve these goals and so everyone is pulling in the same direction with a determined drive to be even more successful. As yet the school's plans are not clearly written down either as an overall strategic plan or in subject plans detailing the precise action as to how and when the goals will be achieved.

Particularly good attention is given to students who need most help to learn. Data is used well to organize classes and to identify those students who would benefit from additional help in the before and after school sessions and in the Saturday academy. Staffing is identified to make sure these students receive effective individual and small group support in lessons.

The school's high expectations for students' personal and academic development are conveyed to parents through a range of meetings and newsletters. Outcomes from the analysis of parent surveys are shared and the school outlines how it will respond to suggestions for improvement. Family meetings when students first start at the school offer very good opportunity for the schools expectations, information about its work and goals to be shared. Older students are clear about what is expected from them and regular conversations with teachers ensures that they are clear about their next learning steps especially in reading and writing. There are high levels of satisfaction expressed by parents and students alike.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

The school has a well planned and well organized curriculum that places particular emphasis on developing students’ knowledge, understanding and skills in literacy, mathematics, science and social studies. A music and gym program and various opportunities for students to take part in enrichment activities add interest to learning. There are some good links between subjects and to support the character building (REACH) program that add purpose and meaning to students’ learning. For example, the ‘wordly wise’ program ensures vocabulary to be used in one subject is practiced in another and is defined so that students are clear about each word’s meaning. Literacy skills are practiced in all subjects through research and writing. There are plans to develop students’ use of technology in all subjects because it is recognized that these skills are not practiced regularly enough.

Students say they enjoy school because learning is fun. They particularly like the practical subjects such as mathematics and science. Good emphasis is given to their personal development and so all students are sensible and polite, and behave well in school. While students feel able to go to adults for help with their work, not all are confident to ask an adult for help with a personal issue or concern. Some feel that issues are not always tackled well and feel that they can sort things out more effectively by themselves.

The extensive range of diagnostic and interim assessments enables teachers to plan for learning in their homogeneous classes. As a result, students do work which requires different amounts of support and challenge according to their abilities. Particularly good use is made of assessment data to identify gaps in knowledge and concepts and teachers plan work to tackle these deficiencies. However, all students within the same classes are still expected to do this same work, even those who the assessments show are already able to do what is planned. As a result, the highest achieving students are not always challenged sufficiently and so are not always engaged fully in all lessons.

Budget, staffing and scheduling decisions are based precisely on the data and so support the school’s work highly effectively. Attendance is monitored rigorously. Students and parents are very clear about what happens if they are absent or late and so most students attend everyday and get to school on time. Scholar dollars in the middle school and other incentives in the elementary school reward those students who come to school regularly and who show good commitment to their learning.

**Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is well developed.**

The school is building its capacity highly effectively as it develops and grows to its full enrollment. Staff are selected for their dedication and commitment to do the very best for students in their classes and the ability to use data to plan suitable learning programs. As a result, teachers work together effectively to evaluate how well students are doing. They

talk to each other openly about how they can improve instruction and develop and revise plans accordingly.

A good range of professional development activities are planned and organized by the school. These are closely linked to the needs of individual teachers, to the school's needs and to the identified needs of students arising from data analysis. Teachers share with other teachers the ideas they gain from the range of professional development activities so that they all benefit from their experiences.

The principals regularly visit classes. They observe instruction and check how effectively programs are being taught. A good number of meetings enable all staff to discuss every student's needs at some point and identify whether further support or extension programs are required. Open and honest evaluations, on how effectively class programs and instruction are helping individual students to make good progress, lead to adjustments in programs and interventions.

The principals are well respected by staff, students and parents. They are clear about the school's successes and have set up clear systems that enable the school to run very smoothly from day-to-day and to ensure continuous evaluations of its work. There is a strong focus on student achievement and success.

The school works closely with parents and support services to help it achieve its goals for special education students. A wide and varied range of visits and visitors enrich the school's curriculum and help it to achieve its goals. Older students exchange their scholar dollars for residential visits to Philadelphia and Washington DC, recognizing that privileges have to be earned.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

Both principals have a clear strategic view as to how the school will grow to be a kindergarten through grade 12 school. They are clear about how to extend assessment procedures to support the school's work and which programs they intend to implement to meet all students' particular needs. As yet, these plans are not formally recorded and lack the detail required to outline precisely how the school's goals will be achieved.

The staff meets regularly to review how well the school is doing against its long-term and interim goals in response to data about student performance. The school's goals identify an expected increase on the previous year's performance. While goals are aspirational, they are not linked directly enough to the levels students are expected to reach at the end of each year. It is therefore difficult to ascertain whether the goals are set too high or indeed whether they could be set even higher in some years for some grades.

The effectiveness of interventions and programs is set within a comprehensive system for monitoring the progress and performance of all students. Close evaluation of assessment data leads to immediate changes in programs and interventions should the school note that progress is not as good as expected. The school ensures that the needs of all the

students are evaluated and programs identified to further meet their and the school's goals.

**Quality Statement 6 – School's Board has provided "effective" oversight and leadership as needed and is functioning in accordance with the agreed upon charter.**

**This area of the school's work is Well-Developed.**

The Board is responsible for the overall direction and fiscal well being of the school. As such, the Board has the authority and duty to adopt policies and by-laws that are necessary to meet its statutory responsibilities and produce optimal academic results. Those administrative and daily operational responsibilities need to be delegated to principals, senior management/administrators, and board appointed officers to manage the school within the established policies. The principal senior administrators, and board appointed officers should then be held accountable for performance.

Achievement First Crown Heights Charter School's (AFCH) board of trustees is functioning as stipulated by charter contract. The board is equipped with legal, finance, community member, and education expertise to continue providing guidance in policy implementation. The board has a formal evaluation process to evaluate the school leader.

The board of trustees has been presented with sufficient financial and other relevant information during board meetings to make informed decisions and work collaboratively towards the school's stated mission. With several other competing priorities, the board may want to consider adopting a document that integrates the school's progress towards goals stated in the charter. The board approved budget is consistently monitored and compared to year-to-date expense, variance analyzed, and justifications provided by staff. The budget preparation process involves board members, teacher inputs, school leader, and the school's business manager. Finally, the board has adequately provided oversight in several aspects of school operations.

**Quality Statement 7 – School has developed internal controls in place to detect and prevent financial fraud. School has written policies to guide ongoing operations and those policies are followed by school employees.**

**This area of the school's work is Well-Developed.**

AF CH maintains excellent internal controls to prevent fraud and the school has done well in segregating staff functions. The school is advised to have an inventory practice and tag *all* fixed assets (including DYCD assets) that will help the school become an efficient organization and strengthen the asset balance sheet. A sampling of invoices, purchase orders, and proof of payment was conducted during the site visit. No material weakness was found. AF CH has proper documentation in place and the school is following policies adopted by the board of trustees.

**Quality Statement 8 – Based on the most recent financial statements, school is in sound fiscal condition.**

**This area of the school’s work is Well-Developed.**

A charter school should be able to operate with an annual budget that reflects the expected revenue and expenses for the fiscal year. Since the revenue stream for charter schools tends to be based upon the number of students served (per pupil revenue) and the State and Federal grant (title, etc...) funding, a continued and growing negative net balance poses threat to school’s stability and the ability to fulfill its short and long-term financial obligations.

Based on AF CH’s financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2006, AF CH is in excellent financial condition. The school spent 85% of its funds on educational activities and less than 15% on administrative expenses. The school continues to enjoy a healthy financial outlook with a strong ability to meet its short term financial obligations with minimal debt/liability on its books.

Besides Approved Operating Expense (AOE) per pupil funding, the school also receives Other Than Personnel Services (OTPS) grants from Department of Youth & Community Development (“DYCD”). School is recommended to have bids for DYCD related purchases in future or a written explanation of why bids were not obtained. School provided invoices of all DYCD related purchases at the site visit.

**Quality Statement 9 – School has the structure to integrate parents and community partners in the school.**

**This area of the school’s work is Well-Developed.**

The school continues to enjoy excellence in this category and has several avenues to formulate parental input into the program. AF CH has various planned parent awareness events and meeting opportunities in place to encourage continued parent and community participation.

Parents praised the user friendly progress reports, teachers’ willingness to communicate (email, cell phone, etc..) and provide feedback as needed. They mentioned their kids being independent in their daily homework and described the school as a place where learning continues to be fun for their kids.

Parents were aware of the Board meetings and their rights (appeals process) as parents at the school. They felt good at Board meetings as the Board was very accommodating and responsive to parents’ needs and to hearing parental input.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

**SCHOOL NAME: Achievement First – Crown Heights Charter School**

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<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.</b>	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school</li> </ul>			X
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	

<b>Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student’s and group of students’ outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other’s classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.			X
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan’s interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 6 – School’s Board has provided “effective” oversight and leadership as needed and is functioning in accordance with the agreed upon charter.</b>	∅	✓	+
6.1 The Board size, structure and composition are appropriate. The membership is diverse (G/S/E) and complements a broad skill set.			X
6.2 Board functions as stipulated by contract, and is a well-functioning organization.			X
6.3 Board has adopted and communicated the whistleblower policy with staff members.			X
6.4 Board has provided effective oversight in operational, fiscal, academic, hiring & firing (as appropriate) issues of the school.			X
6.5 Board conflicts (if any) were resolved in timely fashion and had no effect on school operations.			X
6.6 Board evaluates partner organization at least once a year. OCS was notified of any changes in partnership agreement.			X
6.7 Board has been responsive to both parent and school staff concerns/complaints (if any)			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 6</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 7 – School has developed internal controls in place to detect and prevent financial fraud. School has written policies to guide ongoing operations and those policies are followed by school employees.</b>	∅	✓	+
7.1 School has a comprehensive financial control system in place. Check signing, procurement, inventory controls, bank reconciliation, travel reimbursement, investment, petty cash, conflict of interest, vacation and sick leave, bonus relocation, etc. policy is in place.			X
7.2 School has segregated staff duties to prevent and detect fraud.			X

7.3 School is consistently following its adopted financial procedures for requisition approval, certification of funds and placing of orders for goods.			X
7.4 School's employees are familiar with school's established financial procedures.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 7</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 8* – Based on the most recent financial statements, school is in sound fiscal condition.</b>	∅	✓	+
8.1 School's total educational expense / total expense ratio is above 70% for this fiscal year.			X
8.2 School's administrative ratio is under 30% for this fiscal year.			X
8.3 School's current ratio is greater than or equal to 2.0.		X	
8.4 School's debt to asset ratio is less than or equal to 1.0.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 8</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 9 – School has structure to integrate parents and community partners in the school.</b>	∅	✓	+
9.1 School has a parent organization or a parent teacher organization.			X
9.2 School has special events for parents to meet, discuss issues and socialize with each other.			X
9.3 Parents are informed of the time and location of the open Board meetings.			X
9.4 Newsletters are sent in all predominant languages of the neighborhood to encourage parent participation and eliminate cultural and language barriers.			X
9.5 Parent handbook stipulates the appeals process should a conflict arise.			X
9.6 Has a clear idea of how the pupil has improved since attending this school.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 9</b>			X

\*Note on Statement 8: School's current year in operation and other extenuating circumstances (facilities acquisition, capital renovation, etc..) will be taken into account while assigning a grade.