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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

K-8 Charter Schools Closing the Achievement Gap

INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION

K–8 Charter Schools Closing the Achievement Gap

I N N O V A T I O N S I N E D U C A T I O N

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Foreword

From our small towns to our inner cities, I've visited innovative charter schools throughout the country that are changing the face of education. Like the schools highlighted in this guide, successful charter schools are showing their drive to improve levels of student achievement and their commitment to the difficult task of educating every child.

The seven schools profiled here are dispelling the myth that some students cannot achieve to high standards. They demonstrate that when presented with a challenging curriculum, high expectations, and the proper support, all our students can excel academically.

In this guide, you will read about schools that are acting as laboratories for innovative educational practices. Many implement a longer academic day and year, some provide programs based on community needs, and all are proving that breaking tradition and taking risks can yield tremendous results for students.

This guide is part of a series produced by the U.S. Department of Education, and it builds on two previous works: *Successful Charter Schools*, which was published in 2004, and *Charter High Schools Closing the Achievement Gap*, which was published last year. Previous guides have highlighted promising practices to expand the pool of high-quality charter schools and strategies to engage parents. A forthcoming publication will feature ways in which distance learning can increase students' access to rigorous academic course work.

I hope the following examples of charter schools will help other schools and communities as they work to close achievement gaps and reach our goal of every child reading and doing math at grade level by 2014. The demands of the 21st century are not going to wait, and we need schools that will help every child reach his or her potential today.

Margaret Spellings, Secretary
U.S. Department of Education



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Representatives of the seven schools participating in the development of this guide and the case studies on which it is based were generous with both their time and attention to this project. We would like to thank those who were instrumental in coordinating and participating in the site visits.

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Introduction

Parents of all income levels and backgrounds face a daunting array of questions as their children approach kindergarten. Will my child learn to read and to solve mathematical problems? Are the teachers well qualified? Even more fundamentally, is the neighborhood elementary school safe?

In high-poverty communities these questions are especially urgent and the school options for families woefully meager. Indeed, traditional public schools have struggled to successfully educate poor and minority students. In high-poverty communities, dangerous conditions can make it hard for students to make their way safely to school, and for schools to attract high-quality teachers. While there have been gains in recent years at the elementary level, white and Asian American students still consistently outperform their African-American, Hispanic, and Native American peers. Students with disabilities and those from poor families lag behind, as do English language learners.¹

But some public schools are successfully tackling the achievement challenge. This guide profiles seven K–8 charter schools that are making headway in narrowing gaps in achievement. It examines factors contributing to these charter schools' hard-earned successes, highlighting practices that may inspire and inform other school communities as they strive to help all students meet high academic standards. For underserved children, these charter schools offer hope.

School reform efforts across the nation aim to close the achievement gap. The goal? Raise achievement levels and ensure that all students—no matter their race, ethnicity, income level, learning differences, or home language—are well educated and held to a high standard. The first concrete step in this endeavor is identifying where the gaps are and strategizing intervention and approaches to closing those gaps.

As part of the nationwide push to ensure student proficiency in mathematics and reading, achievement data has become more transparent. Specifically, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) requires that students be tested every year using standardized state tests and that results

be reported to the public in various ways. In addition to parents receiving test results for their individual students, the public has online access to school report cards showing how all students at the school are performing. This provides powerful tools for comparison among schools within a state. To monitor how students are doing nationwide, educators and policymakers rely on results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, also known as the Nation's Report Card, standardized mathematics and reading exams administered to a random sample of students across the country.

Results from the most recent battery of NAEP tests, administered in 2005, are encouraging.

Fourth-graders showed consistent gains in reading proficiency and gaps narrowed to the smallest size in history when comparing the achievement of white students to their African-American and Hispanic peers.² In mathematics, while the overall achievement gap did not narrow, scores went up across the board. Importantly, average scores for white, African-American, and Hispanic fourth-graders were higher in 2005 than in any previous assessment year.³

Breaking those overall results down reveals further, more specific gains. Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (an indicator of family poverty) had higher average scores in mathematics in 2005 than in 1996. The percentage of fourth-graders performing at or above basic in mathematics increased by 30 percentage points, and those at or above proficient increased by 23 percentage points. Fourth-graders with disabilities had a higher average score, and a higher percentage of them achieved at or above basic in mathematics than in previous assessment years.⁴

Positive as these numbers are, the work is far from finished. *NCLB* mandates that all students reach proficiency in mathematics and reading by 2014. The bar is high. What recent NAEP results show, however, is that by paying attention to the data, and implementing thoughtful, research-based teaching and assessment practices, schools are empowered to close gaps in achievement and meet *NCLB*'s goal.⁵ In this effort, elementary and middle schools play a critical role, by helping all students to develop a strong foundation in mathematics and reading early on. Within this broad category of schools, those that operate with a charter may have the best chance of making data-driven reforms a reality.

In charter schools, autonomous board members can make decisions quickly and administrators have greater control over school budgets. They can also hire teachers and other school staff who embrace the school mission and, compared to most traditional schools, they can more easily fire staff who are not performing up to par.

The Role of Charter Schools in Closing the Gap

This guide builds on earlier work of the Innovations in Education guides: *Successful Charter Schools* (2004) and *Charter High Schools Closing the Achievement Gap* (2006).⁶ Charter K–8 schools share some common themes with charter high schools: They are mission-driven, working with a clear and tangible set of goals; they teach for mastery, with tests aiming for in-depth understanding; and they hold themselves accountable for successes and failures. Yet, compared to charter high schools, K–8 charter schools also face unique challenges that are specific to educating elementary and middle school-age children.

Since the first charter school legislation was passed in Minnesota in 1991, the number of schools nationwide using this governance model has grown rapidly. By the 2006–07 school year, 40 states and the District of Columbia had adopted charter school laws. That same school year saw the opening of 381 new charter schools in 31 states, an 11 percent increase over the previous year that brought the total number of charter schools nationwide to almost 4,000, serving about 1,150,000 students.⁷

The popularity of charter schools may result in part from their ability to innovate to meet students' needs. In some instances, charter schools have put reforms into place before traditional public schools in their states have been able to do so. Such is the case with one of the schools profiled in this guide, which set up a full-day kindergarten program before its home state made such a program mandatory. Students' needs drive the programs of the schools highlighted in this guide. Although charter schools are eligible to receive federal funding for such programs as special education, the state funding varies according to state charter school legislation. Thus, some charter schools receive less per student funding than their traditional public school counterparts.⁸ Several of these featured schools have implemented innovative funding solutions, including parent donations and securing need-based grants, in order to offer pre-kindergarten programs that enabled them to begin working with students as early as possible.

Even with more limited state and district funding than is typically available to traditional public schools, charter schools are in a unique position to help further national gains in student achievement. Like all public schools, under *NCLB* they are held accountable for results, and if a charter school does not deliver on its education promises, it can lose its contract to operate. Yet, charter schools are free to choose their teaching approaches, rather than having to follow district curricula requirements, and to offer grade configurations (e.g., K–8, 5–8, K–12) less typical of traditional public schools, which tend to be configured as elementary (i.e., K–5), middle (i.e., 6–8), and high school (i.e., 9–12).⁹ Charter school leaders have greater control of their budgets, class and school size, and the

length of the school day and year, and they have more discretion when making hiring and firing decisions. Increased autonomy can make it easier for a charter school to integrate community services and resources, including philanthropic investment, into school programs. Significantly, compared to traditional public schools, charter schools tend to serve a proportionately higher number of low-income and minority students, the precise population of students targeted by school reform efforts.¹⁰ While there remains room for progress, these schools are more successful than traditional public schools in hiring staff that reflect the diversity of their student populations. For example, in 1999–2000, traditional public school staffs averaged 8.9 percent African-American teachers, while African-Americans made up 15.5 percent of charter school teaching staff.¹¹

Although academic achievement data comparing students in charter schools to those in traditional public schools show mixed results, research indicates that charter schools are well positioned to demonstrate more success after the start-up phase. In one study, charter schools that had been open for at least nine years showed an advantage over their neighboring traditional public schools. Hoxby's 2004 nationwide study found that 10 percent more charter school students demonstrated proficiency on state reading and mathematics exams compared to students in nearby traditional public schools.¹² But test results alone do not give the whole picture. Assessment data have limitations, a 2006 study suggests, often ignoring indicators, such as safety, teacher quality, class size, grade configuration, exposure to content, instructional support, parent satisfaction, attendance, and other measures—all areas

where charter schools may be positioned to innovate and excel.¹³ Indeed, when these school climate and governance variables are factored in, charter schools appear to demonstrate a better attunement to student needs and greater success in meeting them.

A close look at the individual missions of successful charter schools highlights their focus on tailoring programs for the communities they serve. Many charter schools aim to level the playing field for students from low-income and minority backgrounds. Others work explicitly to prepare every student for college and beyond. Such customized approaches are not informal. The schools profiled in this guide operate with a clear mission, defined intentions, and thoughtful goal setting. In so doing, these successful schools have created innovative models that are reducing the achievement gap.

The Charter Schools Featured in This Guide

The seven schools featured here vary considerably, reflecting their sensitivity to the unique communities they serve. One serves kindergarten through sixth grade, three offer K–7 programs, and two serve kindergarten through eighth grade. The seventh is a middle school, offering grades 5–8. Three include prekindergarten programs, six offer full-day kindergarten, and one is expanding to create a high school. Five are located in large cities, and two schools are located in the relatively small cities of Phoenix, Ariz., and Pueblo, Colo. They range in size from 114 to 1,100 students. Six of the schools serve populations that are 96 percent or more students of color. Students who qualify for free or reduced-price

lunch account for at least 60 percent of each student body, and at three of the schools, they account for over 90 percent of the student body. One school uses a dual-language approach, by which a Spanish-speaking teacher works concurrently with an English-speaking teacher. At one school, 92 percent of students are English language learners. Three schools offer special education services to 10–12 percent of their students, with all seven having moderate to low percentages (under 5 percent to 12 percent) of students in special education programs.

Each school has adapted to serve its community. All seven offer an extended day and longer school year than their local district schools, while one operates on a year-round schedule. Six of the schools use assessments on an interim basis to monitor how students are doing and what needs to be retaught. Four of the schools are still run by the founding principal, two are led by “turn-around” principals with track records of success at other schools, and three were started by husband-wife teams. The school leaders know their students personally and understand the cultures of the families they serve. One school uses a developmentally based curriculum, structuring grades according to each child’s developmental level, rather than his or her age.

Collectively, these schools have a clear vision of what constitutes excellent teaching. All teach for mastery, doing “whatever it takes” to help students reach proficiency, rather than merely covering the curriculum. Each has found a way to help students meet high standards while nearby public schools have struggled and sometimes failed in this endeavor. (For comparison data, see the school profiles in Part II of this guide, starting on p. 35.)

The schools highlighted in this guide were identified through a multistep selection process, described more fully in Appendix A, that considered a number of factors, among them, overall achievement levels and test scores in comparison to similar schools in the same city or state. An external advisory group of charter school researchers, charter school practitioners, and representatives from various organizations working to support charter schools helped guide the development of a research-based conceptual framework used to analyze candidate schools and to inform site selection criteria.

To be considered for the guide, a school had to show solid evidence of effectively closing the achievement gap among different student subgroups. Based on state standardized test data, “closing the gap” is defined as students outperforming local district public schools that serve a similar population of students in mathematics and reading. Alternately, it may mean that certain subgroups—including African-American and Hispanic students, special education students, English language learners, and students that qualify for free or reduced-price lunch—are exceeding state averages in mathematics and reading. In cases of schools with internally diverse populations, closing the gap means that students of different subgroups are achieving on par within the school. Schools included in this guide must have met adequate yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks for at least the past two consecutive years. Additionally, at least half of the students at a school must qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, be of a minority status, or both.

Each profiled school received a two-day visit during which researchers spoke directly with

teachers, students, parents, administrators, and members of the governing board, both individually and sometimes in focus groups. Illustrative materials, such as the artifacts highlighted in this guide, were collected from all sites.

This is not experimental research that can make causal claims about what works. Readers should judge for themselves the merits of these practices and reflect on why the practices are working in these specific contexts. These descriptions do not constitute an endorsement of specific practices or products. However, this descriptive research process has revealed that while there are differences from one school to another, it is the similarities among the schools that may prove helpful for others looking to close the achievement gaps among their own students.

Common themes found at these highlighted charter schools include:

Closing the Achievement Gap—Each of these schools is closing the achievement gap by outperforming local district schools serving a similar population of students, or by meeting or exceeding the state testing averages in mathematics and reading.

Mission-driven—These schools create a shared vision with school leaders, teachers, parents, and students all relentlessly focused on ensuring student success.

Teaching for Mastery—Teachers are not simply providing a rigorous curriculum. They are expected to teach for understanding. The use of interim assessments helps teachers monitor student progress in mastering concepts and

standards and makes them aware when reinforcement is needed.

Positive School Culture—Each school creates a safe learning environment and a strong school culture built around the education vision, creating a unique, focused community. School staff respond to students’ academic and social needs and take responsibility for doing whatever it takes to ensure student learning.

Families as Partners—Schools engage parents in a variety of ways, such as requiring them to sign off on nightly homework and participate in school decision-making. Many also partner with community resources to provide parents with ongoing adult education opportunities.

Holding Themselves Accountable—These schools tend to be well run, with active governing boards that generate creative solutions to challenges and empower administrators to implement decisions promptly. They are fiscally resourceful, ensuring that every dime is well spent in support of the school’s mission.

Innovating Across the Program—They have flexibility that traditional public schools often do not have to create a longer school day or year, design unique staffing arrange-

ments, involve community organizations, and make budget decisions that advance the goals of their school.

Continuous Professional Learning and Improvement—These schools are committed to ongoing internal professional development, often arranging time for teachers to work collaboratively. Coaching and training are provided, and all staff members are engaged in continuous professional learning.

Part I of this guide explores these common themes in more depth. To illustrate the points more fully, sample materials collected at the school sites are presented in accompanying figures. This cross-site section ends with a discussion of implications.

Part II is intended to provide the reader with a holistic “snapshot” of each school. The individual school profiles in this section were based on observations and interviews, and they offer a view into how each school is making headway at closing gaps in student achievement. A brief profile or narrative of each school brings together important contextual information about each school, its history, and key features. These profiles provide a more comprehensive understanding of each site.



PART I

K–8 Charter Schools Closing the Achievement Gap: Common Themes

All seven schools presented in this guide are making significant inroads toward closing the achievement gaps in their respective school communities. As a group, they have created learning environments where historically underserved children are thriving. As a group, these successful charter schools operate in different geographic locations, serve a range of student populations, and offer different approaches to curriculum and instruction. Yet, there are significant commonalities among the schools. How is it that when faced with many of the same challenges, these fledgling charter schools are succeeding in closing achievement gaps where many of their traditional public school counterparts have not? Among other strengths, each of these charter schools is driven, as one school leader puts it, to do “whatever it takes” to ensure student achievement. Each has committed itself to the hard work of teaching student by student.

Closing the Achievement Gap

Working with many children who enter school performing far below grade level and who are from neighborhoods and families with scant resources, these schools are not settling for anything less than the best for their students. School leaders at Amistad Academy in New Haven, Conn., seek to “change the life options of kids so they can succeed in college and life,” says Doug McCurry, superintendent of the New Haven-based non-profit Achievement First, which was formed to replicate the Amistad model in other schools. “It’s not about raising [scores] from the 20th percentile to the 35th. That’s still poor. We want dramatic gains in academics and character.”

Across the board, these charter schools are managing to bring student test scores up to and beyond the numbers earned by more affluent students. A few examples include:

- Alain Locke Charter Academy (Alain Locke), in Chicago, saw 72 percent of its students meet state standards in mathematics, reading, and science in 2005, compared with 31 percent of students in neighboring schools and 69 percent statewide. Due to its students’ 58-point gain from 2002 to 2005 in mathematics, reading comprehension, and science scores on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), Alain Locke earned the title of most-improved school in the Chicago Public School System. Students at Alain Locke outperform the state average in almost

Table 1. Selected Variables of Profiled K–8 Charter School Sites ^a

| School and Location | Year First Chartered & Authorizer | Grades | Enrollment | Student Population Ethnicity | Percentage English Language Learners | Percentage Special Education |
|--|---|---------|------------|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Alain Locke Charter Academy Chicago | 1999 Chicago Public Schools Board of Education | Pre-K–8 | 505 | 94% African-American 5% White 1% Hispanic ^b | 0 | 12% |
| Amigos Por Vida— Friends for Life Charter School Houston | 1999 Texas State Board of Education | Pre-K–6 | 374 | 98.6% Hispanic 0.7% African-American 0.7% White ^b | 95.4% ^b | 5% ^c |
| Amistad Academy New Haven, Conn. | 1999 State of Connecticut | K, 5–9 | 405 | 64% African-American 31% Hispanic 2% White ^b | 10.0% ^b | Less than 5% |
| Carl C. Icahn Charter School Bronx, N.Y. | 2001 SUNY Charter Schools Institute | K–7 | 278 | 59% African-American 41% Hispanic ^b | NA | 5% |
| Cesar Chavez Academy Pueblo, Colo. | 2001 Pueblo City District Colorado | K–8 | 1,100 | 75% Hispanic 23% White 1% African-American 1% Native American ^c | 62.0% ^c | 12% |
| The Intergenerational School Cleveland | 2000 Lucas County Educational Service Center | K–7 | 114 | 86% African-American 4% White 1% Asian American 9% Multiracial | NA | 8% |
| Pan-American Elementary Charter School Phoenix | 2001 Arizona State Board for Charter Schools | K–7 | 270 | 97% Hispanic 2% African-American 0.4% White ^c | 62.0% | Less than 5% |

^a Unless otherwise indicated, these data are reported by the school and are for the school year 2006–07.

^b These data are drawn from school report cards for 2005–06 posted on state education agencies' Web sites.

^c These data are reported online for 2005–06 at <http://www.schoolmatters.com>.

^d Includes aftercare, summer camp, summer school.

^e Core Knowledge curriculum developed by E. D. Hirsch to focus on key concepts of western civilization in mathematics, language, and more.

^f Core Knowledge curriculum hybrid means the school uses some Core Knowledge curriculum and augments it with additional resources and materials.

| Free or Reduced-Price Lunch | Annual Cost per Student | State Per-Pupil Funding | Distinctive Features |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 89.0% ^b | \$7,000 | \$6,500 | Year-round schedule |
| 99.7% ^b | \$8,829 | \$6,436 | Dual language program in Spanish and English |
| 84.0% ^b | \$11,000 | \$8,250 | Data-driven instruction: use of interim assessments |
| 89.0% ^b | \$9,829 | \$9,084 | Core Knowledge curriculum; ^e professional development coaches for teachers |
| 62.0% ^b | \$8,696 | \$6,342 | Core Knowledge curriculum hybrid; ^f tutoring support programs |
| 59.0% ^b | \$8,818 ^d | \$7,616 | Multiage classrooms; Intergenerational focus |
| 98.0% ^c | \$6,109 | \$6,080 | Accelerated curriculum |

every measure: Ninety-four percent of third-graders met or exceeded state mathematics standards in school year 2004–05, compared with 56 percent of the same-age students in the local district and 79 percent of Illinois third-graders overall.

- Amigos Por Vida—Friends for Life Public Charter School (APV), in Houston, serves a larger percentage of new immigrant students and English language learner (ELL) students than other Houston public and charter schools. Yet, 99 percent of its third-graders met state mathematics standards on Texas standardized tests in 2005, compared with a range of 52 percent to 65 percent of third-graders at other local elementary schools and 88 percent for students state-wide. On state reading and language arts tests in 2004–05, the school’s third-graders outperformed their peers at all local elementary schools but one.
- Amistad Academy’s eighth-graders outperformed their neighborhood peers on tests administered in the 2005–06 school year, with 68 percent meeting reading standards compared to only 35 percent of eighth-graders in other New Haven public schools. On mathematics tests, 60 percent of Amistad eighth-graders met standards, compared with 28 percent of their public school peers districtwide.
- Cesar Chavez Academy (CCA), in Pueblo, Colo., not only consistently outperforms other district and state schools that serve student populations with similar demographics, its students’ performance significantly exceed the state averages for all schools. On state tests in 2005–06, CCA third-graders scored proficiency levels of 94 percent in reading, 96 percent in writing, and 100 percent in mathematics. Also, that year, CCA fourth-graders scored 88 percent proficient on reading, 86 percent on writing, and 94 percent on mathematics tests, compared to fourth-grade scores statewide of 68 percent

for reading, 50 percent for writing, and 69 percent for mathematics.

- Carl C. Icahn Charter School (Icahn Charter School), in the Bronx, was recognized in 2006 by the New York Board of Regents and the New York State Education Department as a high-performing and gap-closing school. This recognition came after Icahn Charter School students met all state language arts and mathematics standards during the 2004–05 school year, and the school met AYP in language arts, mathematics, and science in both 2002–03 and 2003–04 school years. In 2005–06, Icahn Charter School’s third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders outperformed all other New York charter schools in English and language arts. Also that year, a full 100 percent of Icahn Charter School third- and fourth-graders scored proficient and above on state mathematics assessments, compared with 60.8 percent of third-grade students and 52.3 percent of fourth-graders in the district.
- The Intergenerational School (TIS), in Cleveland, had 100 percent of its third-graders score proficient or higher on state reading and mathematics assessments in 2005–06, compared to 50.7 percent of Cleveland Municipal School District third-graders in reading and 43.4 percent in mathematics. The Ohio Department of Education gave TIS a rating of excellent, while Cleveland Municipal was on academic watch. Also in 2005–06, TIS met AYP, while the district as a whole did not.
- Pan-American Elementary Charter School (PAES), in Phoenix, outperformed schools in its own district, both traditional public elementary and other charter schools, on Arizona’s state mathematics, reading, and writing tests in 2004–05, with higher percentages of students in grades 3 and 5 scoring proficient or above.

But scores do not tell the whole story. Behind these encouraging numbers are children whose lives change dramatically through the day-to-

day work of learning in a positive and effective environment. Principals and teachers interviewed for this guide shared stories of students demonstrating major shifts in attitude and behavior, growing from low-achievers into strong students who consider it “cool” to earn good grades. Other school leaders described struggling students who want to learn and who, through determination and effort, become successful learners and high achievers.

One such student, at CCA, made remarkable strides after struggling in traditional schools. The year the school opened, this fourth-grader, Patricia,* walked into the unfinished building and asked the principal what he was doing. When he answered that he was building a school, she asked, “Can I come?” When he explained that she needed to apply, she froze. Patricia’s father had abandoned the family, her mother was in prison, and the girl herself had been diagnosed as having severely limited intellectual capacity, with an IQ of around 60. She was unable to read and lived with an uneducated grandmother, who subsequently signed Patricia’s application for CCA. Walking through the tough neighborhood in which CCA is located, Patricia came to school every day and received intensive academic, developmental, and behavioral interventions. “We taught her a lot of skills,” recalls principal and cofounder, Lawrence Hernandez. Patricia is now an accomplished tenth-grader who maintains a 4.0 average.

Another child entered the third grade at Icahn Charter School unable to decode or read, in spite of high scores at his previous school. With hard work and support from the school, the boy showed major progress on state tests. “He

.....
* A pseudonym

worked his head off and he did great,” says Icahn Charter School principal Jeffrey Litt. “I called his mother to tell her his results. She was screaming and crying into the phone, ‘Mr. Litt, I love you,’ and I told her, ‘No, love him. He worked hard.’”

Common Factors Among All Schools

What is going on behind the scenes to explain such successes? One common strategy is that school leaders concern themselves with more than test scores. Teachers care that students are mastering concepts and skills, learning to think critically, solving problems, understanding what they read, and writing coherently. The seven themes highlighted below show some of the practices common to these schools that contribute to their strengths and successes.

Mission-driven

Each of these schools has a clear focus and mission. Most emerged because motivated parents and educators were dissatisfied with the quality and safety of existing public schools in underserved communities. Aiming to close gaps in achievement between urban and suburban students in Connecticut, graduates of Yale University Law School founded Amistad Academy in 1999. Similarly, TIS founder Catherine Whitehouse was appalled by the poor teaching she witnessed in Cleveland’s public school classrooms. She hoped to “create something different” by opening a charter school that fosters lifelong learning and where both older and younger generations can connect (e.g., seniors serve as reading buddies, tutors, or mentors for students). In one case, a charter school opened where there had been *no* local school; prior to

the opening of APV, local students had been bused out of their neighborhood.

Everyone involved with a new charter school goes out on a limb at first to get the new school off the ground. Some are fortunate enough to have a benefactor. Icahn Charter School opened in 2001 with the financial backing of billionaire Carl C. Icahn, whose Foundation for a Greater Opportunity finances the improvement of education in New York City. As the school’s sponsor, the foundation provides it with ongoing support.

But most charter school founders face big challenges. Although Phoenix’s PAES now serves 270 students in kindergarten through seventh grade and will add eighth grade next year, the school got off to a bumpy start. Delayed building inspections pushed the opening day off by more than a month. With 200 students enrolled and ready to start school in early August, doors did not open until mid-September. “Many of our parents just waited and waited, but [others] got nervous that [we] weren’t opening the doors. ... So they pulled out,” recalls principal Marta Pasos, who had to lay off some teachers when enrollment dropped. Other teachers took a pay cut and administrators were not paid for three months. Pasos and her husband gambled their own personal security and took out loans to cover costs. To keep overhead low, they also wore, and continue wearing, many hats, doing their own busing, payroll, maintenance, and business management. Remarkably, by the middle of the school’s second year, Pan-American was debt-free, making it possible for the school to purchase its building.

Icahn Charter School’s Litt ran into great skepticism when he first considered using the Core

Knowledge curriculum, developed by professor and author E. D. Hirsch to expose children to key concepts of western civilization in mathematics, language, history, science, music, art, and more. When Litt visited a suburban Florida school already using the curriculum and told its staff that he wanted to use it for inner-city South Bronx students, he was met by doubtful educators who argued that the curriculum would not be effective for the population he described. Undaunted, Litt moved forward, adapting the curriculum for his students, who have since proved that his confidence was well placed. They continue to demonstrate that low-income, minority students can and do master this curriculum.

The leaders at these schools are nothing if not committed. (Four of the schools are run by their founders.) Collectively, they pride themselves on accepting responsibility for their students' success. This commitment often is explicitly articulated, as in the mission statement from Pan-American (see fig. 1 on p. 13). As this statement makes clear, school leaders strive to build a strong connection between school and home, and between the school's approaches and the cultural values and traditions of the community. The mission statement also is translated into Spanish, the home language for most Pan-American students. CCA leaders also fuse their school culture with their community's values and work to foster them. CCA's mission—"to prepare a diverse cross-section of Pueblo's children for success as young scholars, citizens of the world, and community leaders"—embraces Latino culture through language, the arts, and history. Even the school's board of directors has become an emissary of this dedication, with board members picking up students who have

difficulty getting to school on time. Principal Hernandez says the school is committed to giving "poor people the power to change their community. We're family," he says. "We're all here for the kids."

In each school, the mission is almost tangible, evident in multiple ways, from displays of student work in hallways and classrooms to the positive way students and teachers interact. At TIS, a class of students readily recited the school mission by heart and in unison for a visiting researcher:

The Intergenerational School fosters an educational community of excellence that provides experiences and skills for lifelong learning and spirited citizenship for learners of all ages.

TIS students recognize that their school is a special community for learning. As evident in figure 2 on page 14, the Intergenerational School's Core Values, such elements as personal integrity, work ethic, interpersonal skills, shared and responsible use of resources, and celebration of diversity shape school values, goals, and objectives. The school's mantra—"learning is a lifelong development process"—is the foundation of its mission.

Each of these schools sets high expectations for its students, makes expectations clear, and provides the necessary support and "scaffolding" for students to be successful. From school to school, the aim is the same: to improve the future prospects for children from low-income and minority backgrounds and, in effect, to level the playing field so that every child has access to an excellent public education.

Positive School Culture

For each of these charter schools, creating a positive, safe school culture, so that everyone can focus on learning, has been critical to success. A safe environment is taken seriously, in part because it is one of the main reasons parents have enrolled their children. Many of these campuses are located in dangerous urban neighborhoods marked by gang and

drug activity. Icahn Charter School, which is located in the South Bronx, uses a security officer, video monitors, and metal fences to keep students safe. But safety also is stressed on a personal level. When a child falls down on the playground at recess, teachers are required to wash the scrape with soap and water, put on a band-aid, and call home. This way, parents are kept informed. These schools are intentional about creating a positive culture and


Figure 1. Pan-American Elementary Charter School: Mission Statement

**Pan-American Elementary
Charter School
Mission Statement**

The Pan-American Elementary mission is to ignite in every child the wonder of learning and to provide meaningful educational experiences in a safe and caring environment.

Pan-American is committed to realizing its mission by providing:

- Strong standards-based academics
- Accelerated instruction based on the student’s own capacity and pace
- An enriched curriculum through exposure to a foreign language (English/Spanish)



Misión de Pan-American

La misión de Pan-American Elementary School es encender en cada niño el deseo de aprender y proporcionarle experiencias educativas significativas en un ambiente agradable y seguro.

Pan-American está comprometida a realizar su misión proporcionando:

- Programas académicos basados en los planes estatales
- Instrucción intensiva basada en el progreso y el avance del estudiante
- Un plan de estudios enriquecido con la exposición a un idioma extranjero (Inglés/Español)

Figure 2. The Intergenerational School’s Core Values (Excerpted from TIS’s 2004–05 Annual Report)

| Accomplishment of School Goals and Objectives | |
|--|--|
| Development of School Values | |
| <p><u>Personal Integrity</u> Is truthful and honest Shows positive leadership Willingly helps other</p> <p><u>Work Ethic</u> Stays on task during independent work time Puts forth best effort on work Completes homework consistently</p> <p><u>Choice and Accountability</u> Follows instruction promptly Accepts responsibility and consequences for choices Shows verbal self-control Shows physical self-control</p> <p><u>Honoring Interconnected Web of Life and Time</u> Participates well in intergenerational activities Interacts respectfully with adult visitors and volunteers</p> | <p><u>Interpersonal Skills</u> Shares and takes turns Listens when others are talking Interacts well with peers Interacts well with adults Solves conflicts effectively</p> <p><u>Shared and Responsible Use of Resources</u> Takes care of school materials Returns books and materials to school on time Cleans up after using materials</p> <p><u>Celebration of Diversity</u> Values opinions of others Shows interest in learning about other cultures Responds positively to culturally-diverse literature</p> |

about maintaining open communication with the families they serve.

Part of this approach involves offering students incentives, such as leadership roles in the student-led recycling program at TIS and “scholar dollar paychecks,” a positive incentive program at Amistad Academy, where students earn and accumulate points toward special activities for positive efforts and progress in attendance, homework, and behavior. At APV, students join in a mathematics competition to win prizes, such as bicycles. Classes there are also named after universities, and students learn to sing college anthems and compete in such monthly events as designing the best college banner.

There is a pervasive sense in these schools that it is “cool to be smart.” After-school programs extend student learning. For example, Alain Locke takes students on trips to college campuses. These charter schools promote respect and value culturally relevant practices so that students feel connected to their community and culture. These are schools where staff and students want to be, where the energy is positive, and where hard work is rewarded.

These schools recognize that acknowledging student achievements—either through individual rewards or whole-school meetings—fosters a positive attitude and a strong sense of community. The simple act of coming together as a community, learning how to respectfully

listen, and being an appreciative audience is not taken for granted. It is a skill that teachers and school leaders teach intentionally, to provide students with step-by-step guidance to meet not only academic, but also social and behavioral standards. The first assembly of the year, explains TIS principal Whitehouse, was cancelled because students were unable to sit still and listen. Whitehouse sent students back to their classrooms, and for two weeks they practiced the skills of being a polite, attentive audience. “Now when we have community meetings, the kids walk in, sit down, and wait quietly for the meeting,” Whitehouse says. “The children have learned to line up quietly to walk through the hallways and to pay attention when adults ask them to listen to the presentations.”

Expectations are very clear. At Amistad Academy, they are presented transparently as “REACH” values: respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship, and hard work. *Respect* includes respecting teachers, being nice to teammates, having patience in class, keeping desk, classroom, bathrooms, and school clean; *enthusiasm* means following directions the first time, focusing, and bringing a positive attitude; *achievement* includes doing one’s personal best on all assignments and showing improvement on grades and test scores; *citizenship* includes taking responsibility for one’s actions, being honest, and helping others; and *hard work* means coming to class prepared, in full uniform and with necessary materials. Students are evaluated against these standards by their teachers, who grant REACH awards each month, which consist of certificates presented weekly at an all-school ceremony.

There are fewer discipline problems in these charter schools than at nearby traditional public

schools. When a student has a bad day and off-task behavior occurs, students are given clear warnings and incentives to help them understand what is expected. A baseball diamond-shaped diagram in classrooms at TIS illustrates how the approach works at this school. Students earn strikes and fouls for infractions in class, with the final consequence being a referral to the principal. (Fig. 3 on page 16 shows the referral form used for students who have acquired three strikes.) Conversely, students can earn runs around the bases, with a reward once they reach home base. The most coveted prize? Lunch with the teacher. CCA uses what staff refer to as a “see three before me” approach to discipline, in which, before being sent to the principal, a student receives counseling, guidance, and redirection by three staff members, including a prevention specialist and a psychologist. When a student does receive a referral, for either behavior or academic issues, the team works closely with the student and his or her family, integrating the student’s home and school life into the problem-solving process. (See fig. 4 on page 17 for a flow chart illustrating the school’s discipline process.)

The working assumption across all these schools is that students can meet clear and high expectations. Rather than blaming underperforming students for gaps in their knowledge and skills, these teachers take seriously their responsibility for helping students catch up and meet high expectations. They know how to work with and motivate students who enter performing below grade level, and they are prepared to provide acceleration or remediation as needed. Tutoring is available both before and after school, as are after-school enrichment classes and field trips. Some of these schools also provide health

Figure 3. The Intergenerational School's Form for Referral to Principal for Student Misconduct

Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Dear Principal,

In our classroom we have four rules:

1. Keep your hands, feet, and objects to yourself.
2. One person speaks at a time. Raise your hand and wait to be called upon before speaking.
3. Be where you are supposed to be unless you have permission from the teacher to move.
4. Respect yourself and others.
 - a.) Use a pleasant voice with teachers and classmates. Only say nice things to others, or say nothing at all.
 - b.) We do not throw anything.
 - c.) We listen and follow instructions the first time.
 - d.) We do not make extra noise (drumming, whistling, banging, humming, Velcro shoes, etc.) when we are learning.

The first rule I broke was rule:

1 2 3 4a 4b 4c 4d

The second rule I broke was rule:

1 2 3 4a 4b 4c 4d

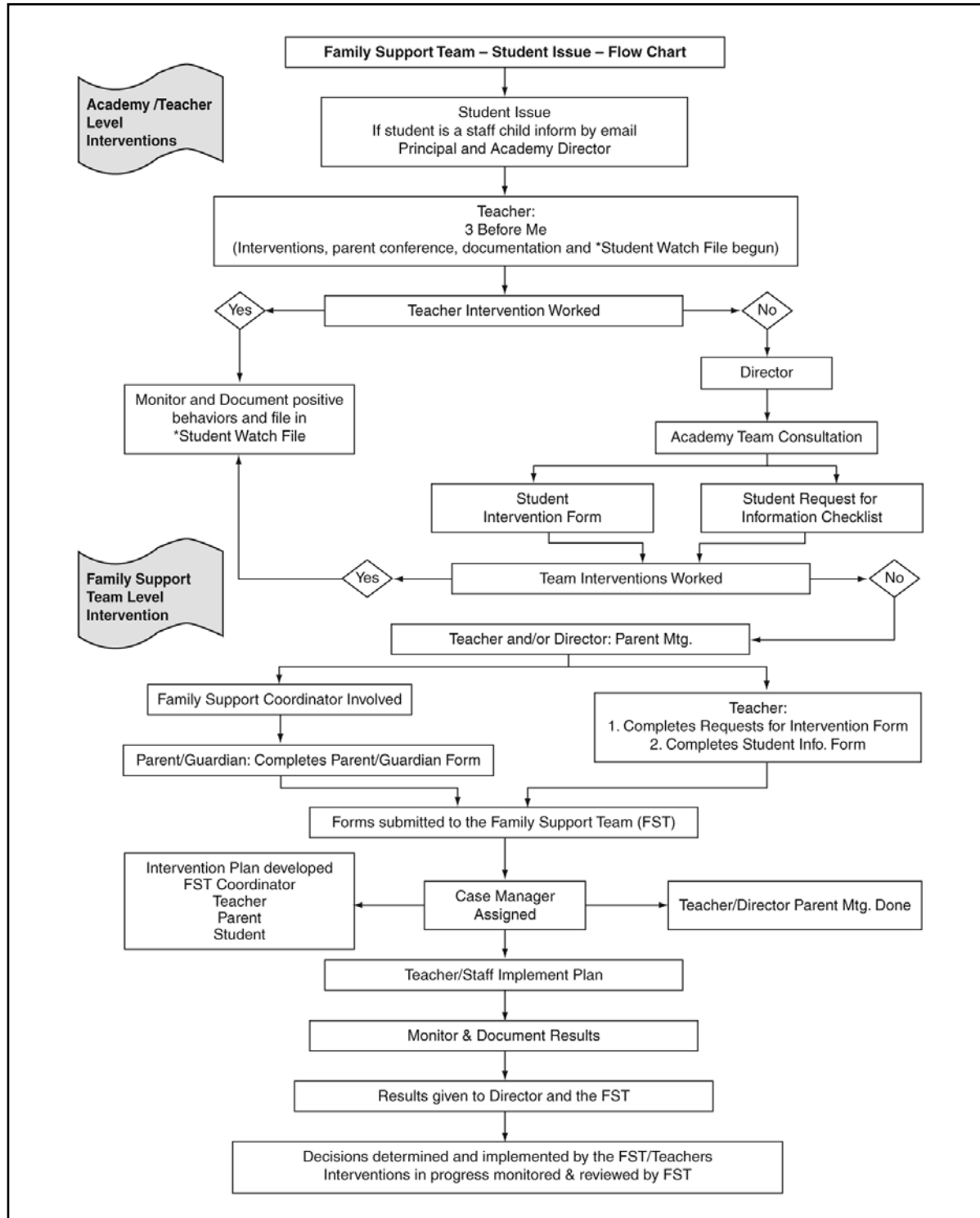
I know that I only have one more chance before I have to be sent home.

Discussion Notes:

Principal Signature _____ Student Signature _____

Parent Signature (Please sign and return)

Figure 4. Cesar Chavez Academy Flow Chart for Identifying Appropriate Student Supports



services to students and their families, including eyeglasses, flu shots, and nutrition guidance.

Teaching for Mastery

Responsiveness to student needs is reflected in teaching approaches as well. While teachers in traditional public schools might complain that their work is too prescribed and that there is too much emphasis on the end goal of raising test scores, teachers see themselves teaching for *mastery*, rather than teaching to the test. Teachers work long hours, spending extra time with students who need the help. “I’m here on a Saturday because I just want the kids to do well,” a teacher at Icahn Charter School explains. “I’m teaching beyond the test and I’m also teaching toward it, so students know that they will be well prepared. You’ve got to teach them for the future.”

Rather than aiming low or going easy on underserved students, these teachers strive to help students acquire deep understanding of the content. This often requires students to spend *more* time at school than is typical, and many of these profiled charter schools have a longer school day and year. Some also work with three- and four-year-olds to help prepare them for kindergarten. PAES offers an accelerated, full-day kindergarten program to ensure that all students are reading by first grade. Icahn Charter School has a mandatory Saturday school program for students who have scored below proficiency on state tests. Alain Locke recently implemented a year-round schedule, with 10 weeks of instruction followed by a three-week intersession break. In a community with few constructive summer opportunities available anyway, school leaders believed that

this year-round schedule would help students maintain learning momentum.

These charter schools have greater freedom than traditional public schools in many ways. They can choose their own textbooks, rather than pick from a district-approved list, and they can make decisions about how much time teachers will spend on specific subjects, rather than follow state-mandated “instructional minutes.” They also have autonomy to decide what curriculum and instructional strategies they will use. Instruction is still geared toward teaching to state standards, since charter students take standardized tests; but teachers in charter schools can approach material in innovative ways, for example, using an individualized, project-based curriculum.

To monitor how well their approaches are working, these schools use interim assessments to gauge student progress and discover which students need support, acceleration, or remediation, and which subjects must be retaught. Assessments used include Accelerated Reader comprehension tests, Success for All reading exams, teacher- and administrator-developed assessment tools to monitor student reading progress on a regular basis, and other methods. (See fig. 5 on page 19 for a chart that shows how TIS staff map the use of specific assessments to monitor student progress in reading.) Several of the highlighted schools have developed sophisticated systems to analyze student progress on specific standards. The resulting data then are used by teachers and administrators to help them understand and adapt instruction to meet students’ learning needs. At Amistad Academy, Icahn Charter School, TIS, and CCA, teachers and administrators interpret interim assessments standard by standard to monitor student progress.

Figure 5. The Intergenerational School Reading Assessment Plan

| The Intergenerational School Reading Curriculum: Rationale, Instruction and Resources | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| The following chart summarizes the reading assessments and standards: | | | |
| Stage | Assessments Used | Stage Criterion | Standards for “Satisfactory Progress” |
| Emerging (K-1) | Concepts of Print: Reading Dolch Sight Words Concept of Word Kdg/First Grade Ohio Reading Diagnostic Test | 90% (17/19) on Concepts of Print: Reading Mastery on Concept of Word “On Track” score in Kdg Diagnostic (53/66) | 50% will complete by end of K equivalent year. Must complete no later than end of 1 st grade equivalent year for “satisfactory progress.” |
| Beginning (1-2) | Running Record of Leveled Literature Dolch Sight Words First/Second Grade Diagnostic Test | Reads level 6 book with 90% accuracy and comprehension “On Track” score on 2 nd Grade Reading Diagnostic (49/65) | 75% will complete by end of 2 nd grade equivalent year. Must complete no later than end of 2 nd grade equivalent year for “satisfactory progress.” |
| Developing (2-3) | Running Record of Leveled Literature Dolch Sight Words 3 rd Grade Ohio Reading Achievement Test | 95% Accuracy on Dolch List Reads level 9 book with 90% accuracy and comprehension Scores Basic or above on 3 rd Grade Reading Achievement Test | 75% will complete by end of 3 rd grade equivalent year. % scoring Proficient or above on 3 rd Grade Achievement test will meet or exceed Ohio AYP standard. |
| Refining (3-4) | Running Record of Leveled Literature 4 th Grade Ohio Reading Achievement Test | Reads level 12 benchmark book with 90% comprehension Scores Basic or above on 4 th Grade Reading Achievement Test* | 75% will complete by end of 4 th grade equivalent year. % scoring Proficient or above on 4 th Grade Achievement test will meet or exceed Ohio AYP standard. |
| Applying (5-6) | 6 th Grade Ohio Reading Achievement Test | Achieves a score of Proficient or above on 6 th Grade Reading Achievement Test | 75% will complete by end of 6 th grade equivalent year. % scoring Proficient or above on 6 th Grade Achievement test will meet or exceed Ohio AYP standard. |

*An advanced student may complete the objectives of the Refining Stage while still at a 3rd grade equivalent level and would not have had the opportunity to take the Ohio 4th Grade Achievement Test. This criterion may also be met by scoring at the Accelerated level on the 3rd Grade Achievement Test.

Some schools even have modified report cards to show parents precisely which standards are challenging their child. For example, at TIS, each developmental stage has a separate report card that includes a detailed list of the specific learning objectives for that stage. For reading, writing, and mathematics standards, students must pass 90 percent of the learning objectives or demonstrate proficiency on state assessments in those subjects before they can move on to the next developmental level.

Principals at some of these highlighted schools report that they have received complaints from parents who want to know why their children had received higher grades at their previous school. The answer, parents are told, is that more is expected of their children at their new schools. In fact, these schools have learned the importance of making sure that parents understand with some specificity what is expected of their children at school. A steady flow of information, in the families' home languages, can help parents understand what their children are studying and why they may be receiving lower marks. At CCA, for example, parents receive a monthly syllabus detailing topics and themes to be taught each month, homework assignments and due dates, and a schedule of upcoming quizzes and tests (see fig. 6 on page 21).

Collectively, these seven schools set high expectations for every student and follow through when it comes time for grade promotion. In order to prepare students for college, staff at Alain Locke assign reading and homework every night and require parents to sign off on completed assignments (see fig. 7 on page 22 for an example of the assignment sheet for first grade). Icahn Charter School requires a 90 percent attendance

rate, satisfactory growth, and a score of average or above on state tests in order for a student to move up to the next grade. To graduate from eighth grade, CCA students must demonstrate what the school refers to as their scholarly capacities through a series of presentations—including a portfolio and a thesis project.

Families as Partners

These schools emphasize a shared sense of responsibility and communication between families and school staff. Principals try to be as approachable as possible, and many schools hold mandatory parent-teacher conferences. TIS holds these conferences in the evenings and on weekends so working parents can attend, and it has a 100 percent parent participation rate. Seeking parent input, many of the schools send out surveys. Icahn Charter School sends out a survey that is written in both English and Spanish. In 2006, the school sent out 245 surveys. All were returned, with 96 percent of parents rating the school good or excellent. (See fig. 8 on page 23 for an excerpt from the survey.)

Parents also are encouraged to be involved in their children's education. At all seven of the schools, parents are asked to sign reading and homework logs daily, listen to their children read every night, and help the school by organizing community potlucks, chaperoning field trips, and serving food at special events.

In some instances this high expectation for involvement is formalized. At Alain Locke, parents, students, and staff all sign a contract that within the school community is commonly referred to as "a commitment to excellence." Parents, for example, commit to holding high expectations

Figure 6. Cesar Chavez Academy Monthly Syllabus for Grades 3, 4, and 5 (Example)

| Cesar Chavez Academy: October Elementary Academy | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 |
| Reading | SFA—Reading comprehension and response, writing, spelling, grammar, usage, vocabulary | SFA—Reading comprehension, response, writing, research, grammar, usage, spelling, vocabulary | SFA—Reading comprehension, response, writing and research, grammar, usage, spelling, vocabulary |
| Language Arts | Norse Mythology—Asgard, Valhalla, Hel, Odin, Thor, trolls, gods/names of week—Tyr, Odin, Woodin, Thor, Freya | Concord Hymn, George Washington, Paul Revere's Ride, Stanza, line, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Rip Van Winkle, Patrick Henry "Give me liberty" speech, Don't put all eggs in basket, Etc. Half loaf | Tales of Sherlock Holmes—The Red-Headed League, A Poison Tree, Some Opposites, The Tiger, pseudonym, imagery, metaphor, simile, symbol, personification, Chip on shoulder, |
| History & Geography | Spanish Exploration cont.—St. Augustine, Geography—Caribbean, West Indies, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Gulf of Mexico, Mississippi, Exploration of Southwest—Spanish explorers, Coronado, Grand Canyon, Rio Grande, Pueblo Indians, Vikings—Scandinavia, Norseman, Eric the Red, Leif Erickson, Early Europeans | American Revolution—Paul Revere's Ride, Concord/Lexington, Bunker Hill, Second Continental Congress, Declaration of Independence—'All men created equal', 'unalienable rights', natural rights, 'right of the people', Revolutionary women, Loyalists, Victory at Saratoga, European helpers, Valley Forge, Benedict Arnold, John Paul Jones, Nathan Hale, Cornwallis, government—republican government, Articles of Confed, Founding Fathers, Constitutional Convention, Spirit of 76 | European Exploration—Trade and Cultures, background, European motivations, Spice European exploration, colonization, Portugal, Spain, England and France, Trade and sugar trade, Transatlantic slave trade |
| Science | Ecology—habitats, balance of nature, food chain, ecosystems, pollution, environmentalism, John Muir | Geology—crust, mantle, core, crustal plates, pangaea, continental drift, earthquakes, San Andreas fault, seismograph, tsunamis, volcanoes, magma, lava, active, dormant, extinct, hot springs, Old Faithful, Vesuvius, Krakatoa, Mount St. Helens, igneous, metamorphic, sedimentary rock, Benjamin Banneker, Elizabeth Blackwell | Chemistry—Elements, Periodic Table, well- elements and symbols, metals and non-metals |
| Visual Arts | Light, shadow, Chapin—Ruby Green Singing, Vermeer—Milkmaid | Copley—Paul Revere, Washington's Crossing of Delaware, Spirit of '76 painting | Elements of art—shape, form, space, color, light, design, symmetry |
| Music | Timbre, Orchestra—trumpet, French horn, trombone, tuba, Mozart—Horn Concertos, Copland—Fanfare for Common Man, Sousa—Stars/Stripes, You're a Grand Old Flag | Melody, Harmony, timbre, form, rhythm, Hayden—Symphony No 94, Blow the Man Down, Waltzing Matilda | Dona Nobis Pacem, Havah Nagilah |
| Mathematics Program | Story problems, place value, base 10, skip count, high/low temperatures, multi-digit subtraction/addition, addends, area, addends, polygons, line segments, measuring length | Using numbers and organizing data—many names for numbers, place value in whole numbers, organizing and displaying data, the median, addition of multidigit numbers, displaying data on a bar graph, subtraction multidigit numbers | Fractions, decimals, and percents—fraction mixed numbers ordering fractions, two finding equivalent fractions, fractions decimals part 1,2, and 3, using a calculator convert fractions to percents, bar and circle |
| Physical Education | Basic exercise, Kinesthetic study of skeletal and muscular body systems | Basic exercise, Kinesthetic study of skeletal and muscular body systems | Basic exercise, Research elements used body from the periodic table |
| Spanish | Vocabulary—Ecology | Vocabulary—Earth | Vocabulary—Elements |
| Computer | Power Point projects—Ecology | Power Point projects—Earth | Power Point—Elements/Periodic Table |

Figure 7. Alain Locke Charter Academy Sample First-grade Homework Assignment Sheet

| Homework Assignment Sheet | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Name | Date(s) 11/6-10/06 | |
| Date | Assignment | Parents' Signature and Comments/Observations. |
| Monday 11/6/2006 | 1. Study for the spelling/sight word test. 2. <u>Practice reading the sight words.</u> 3. Complete the math practice sheet(s). 4. Complete the phonics/reading practice sheet(s). 5. Read to an adult. | |
| Tuesday 11/7/2006 | 1. Study for the spelling/sight word test. 2. <u>Practice reading the sight words.</u> 3. Complete the math practice sheet(s). 4. Complete the phonics/reading practice sheet(s). 5. Read to an adult. | |
| Wednesday 11/8/2006 | 1. Study for the spelling/sight word test. 2. <u>Practice reading the sight words.</u> 3. Complete the math practice sheet(s). 4. Complete the phonics/reading practice sheet(s). 5. Read to an adult. | |
| Thursday 11/9/2006 | 1. Study for the spelling/sight word test. 2. <u>Practice reading the sight words.</u> 3. Complete the math practice sheet(s). 4. Complete the phonics/reading practice sheet(s). 5. Read to an adult. | |
| Friday 11/10/2006 | 1. Read a book to an adult.(Students may borrow a book from school or can also use a book that they have at home. They will also do an Accelerated Reading Quiz on the book at school) 2. Complete a book report on the book read. | |

Reminder(s):

- Sight word and Spelling test will be on Friday, November 10, 2006. See words below and please note that both tests are written tests.

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <u>Sight words</u> | <u>Spelling words</u> |
| 1. come | 1. on |
| 2. your | 2. not |
| 3. family | 3. got |
| 4. children | 4. box |
| 5. father | 5. hot |
| 6. mother | 6. top |
| 7. people | |
| 8. picture | |
| 9. love | |

- The memory piece "I am A Great Somebody" is due Friday, November 10, 2006. Please help your child practice.

Figure 8. Carl C. Icahn Charter School Parent Satisfaction Survey (Excerpt)

PARENT SURVEY JUNE 2006

Please mark each item next to the response that you feel is appropriate.

Por favor poner una seña al lado de cada respuesta que sea apropiada para usted.

1. I feel welcome when I visit this school.

Me siento bien recibida(o) cuando visito la escuela.

- Poor – *nunca*
- Satisfactory – *satisfactorio*
- Good – *bien*
- Excellent – *excelente*

2. This school provides a safe environment for learning.

La escuela mantiene un ambiente seguro para que los estudiantes puedan aprender.

- Poor – *nunca*
- Satisfactory – *satisfactorio*
- Good – *bien*
- Excellent – *excelente*

3. My child has up-to-date instructional tools (books, computers, videos, etc.) that are used effectively.

Mi niña(o) tiene materiales instructivos lo más recientes (libros, computadoras, videos, etc.) que son utilizados efectivamente.

- Poor – *nunca*
- Satisfactory – *satisfactorio*
- Good – *bien*
- Excellent – *excelente*

4. The school holds high academic expectations for my child.

La escuela tiene esperanzas académicas altas para mi niña(o).

- Poor – *nunca*
- Satisfactory – *satisfactorio*
- Good – *bien*
- Excellent – *excelente*

5. The school holds high expectations of discipline for my child.

La escuela tiene esperanzas altas de comportamiento para mi niña(o).

- Poor – *nunca*
- Satisfactory – *satisfactorio*
- Good – *bien*
- Excellent – *excelente*

Carl C. Icahn Charter School is chartered by the New York State Board of Regents and the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute and is a result of the collaborative efforts of the Foundation for a Greater Opportunity and the Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association. Carl C. Icahn Charter School is a public school open to all children on a space available basis, by lottery.

for students and staff, helping their children with daily homework, ensuring their children's regular attendance, and maintaining communication with staff as part of their role in promoting "absolute excellence." At Amistad Academy, parents, student, and teacher all sign the same contract, which notes that if the school is to achieve its "very ambitious goals, we must work together." It then lists specific responsibilities for the teacher, the parents, and the student (see fig. 9 on page 25). The parents at these charter schools tend to follow through on such promises. One Icahn Charter School parent, for example, takes two buses to bring her child to the school. And the commitment goes both ways. At several of the schools, staff members enroll their own children. At CCA, 80 of the students (i.e., 7 percent of total enrollment) are children of school staff.

All of this effort of reaching out to families is paying off. According to the *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report in 2004*, charter schools are more likely than traditional public schools to have high levels of parental involvement in the areas of budget decisions, governance, instructional issues, parent education workshops, and volunteering.¹⁴ At Alain Locke, a parent of two children enrolled in the school was hired as the parent-community liaison and also serves as the enrichment coordinator. She knows every family, ensures smooth end-of-day release of students to the persons authorized to pick them up, organizes parents to conduct fund-raisers for enrichment programs, and also coordinated efforts to build a playground. At APV, a school located in the middle of a mixed-income housing complex, parents have helped paint, repair, remodel, and landscape the school, creating beautiful grounds for the students.

For many of these families, their children's education already is opening up new possibilities. When 15 students at the PAES were selected to participate in a Saturday enrichment experience, Programs for Talented Youth at Arizona State University (ASU), parents needed to take them to the campus each Saturday. For many of the parents, it was their first time on a college campus. Several called home to their families in Mexico, proud and excited to report that their child was attending a program at ASU in Phoenix. For many of them, it was the first time they visualized college as part of their children's future.

Beyond educating their students, these schools bring another important value to their communities: adult education opportunities. PAES offers a "parent university" in January each year. During these sessions, parents learn how to help their children with mathematics and letter sounds and how to research high school options. Throughout the year, PAES reinforces parent education through one-on-one conferences to provide guidance on ways to support their children's academic progress. In partnership with the Family Resource and Learning Center, a complementary program that is located within the school but has its own staff, Alain Locke provides classes for parents. One parent who took a General Educational Development (GED) preparation class at Alain Locke, earned her GED diploma—sometimes called an equivalency certificate—and is now a clerk at the school.

Innovating Across the Program

Even armed with a clear mission and dedicated families, these schools still could go only so far toward achieving their goals were it not for their charters. As charter-governed institutions, these

Figure 9. Amistad Academy School-Student-Parent Contract

**AMISTAD ACADEMY
School-Student-Parent Contract**

Amistad Academy commits to a partnership between parents, students, and school staff to provide the best possible education for our students. In order to achieve our very ambitious goals, we must work together.

Teacher’s Commitment

1. **High Quality Education** – We commit to providing a high-quality education and to going the extra mile for our students. We will work longer school hours, teach during the summer, and always offer our students the best we have.
2. **Support and Respect** – We will appreciate, support, and respect every student.
3. **Communication** – We will communicate regularly with parents about their child’s progress and make ourselves available in person and by phone. We will return parent phone calls within 24 hours.
4. **Homework** – We will assign productive, worthwhile homework every night to reinforce and support skills and concepts learned in class.
5. **Fairness** – We will enforce Amistad’s REACH values consistently and fairly. When students are disciplined or suspended, or when students deserve recognition for their accomplishments, we will inform their parents promptly.
6. **Safety** – We will always protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Parent’s / Guardian’s Commitment

1. **Timeliness/Attendance** – I understand that every school day is important and that it is my responsibility to get my child to school every day on time (7:30 A.M.). If my child needs to miss school, I will contact the school. I will also make sure my child attends Summer Academy, and I will never schedule family vacations during school time.
2. **Support & Homework** – I will always help my child in the best way I know how, and I will do whatever it takes for my child to learn. I will provide a quiet space for my child to study and, if necessary, I will check my child’s homework every night. If my child struggles with homework and is required to attend after-school Homework Club, I will arrange for transportation home at 6:00 p.m.
3. **Independent Reading** – I will insist that my child reads for at least 20 minutes a night (including all three days of the weekend), and I will never sign the reading log unless I have personally seen my child read.
4. **Communication** – I will make myself available to my child and all of his/her teachers. I will return phone calls from school staff within 24 hours. If I am asked to attend a meeting regarding my child’s education or behavior, I will be there.
5. **Uniform** – I will send my child to school every day in the Amistad uniform.
6. **REACH and School Rules** – I will make sure that my child learns to live up to Amistad’s REACH values and high standards of behavior. I, not the school, am responsible for the behavior and actions of my child. I know that my child may lose privileges or have other disciplinary consequences if he/she violates the REACH values.
7. **Attendance at Parent Meetings**: I will attend all required parent meetings, including Back-to-School Night, two Report Card Nights, and “Biggest Job” seminars during the year. I will also complete all the homework I am assigned.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Student’s Commitment

1. **My Best Effort** – I understand that my education is important, and I will always work, think, and behave in the best way I know how and do whatever it takes for my fellow students and me to learn.
2. **Attendance and Timeliness** – I will come to school every day on time (by 7:30 A.M.) and stay until 5:00 P.M. (or later if I have Homework Club or other responsibilities). If I need to miss class, I will ask for and make up all missed assignments.
3. **Uniform** – I will wear my Amistad uniform properly every day and follow the school dress code.
4. **Homework** – I will complete all of my homework and reading every night. I will not offer excuses; I will seek the help I need to complete all my homework in a top-quality manner.
5. **Communication** – I will raise my hand to ask for help if I do not understand something. I will make myself available to my teachers and parents about any concerns they might have.
6. **Responsibility** – If I make a mistake, I will tell the truth and accept responsibility for my actions
7. **REACH** – I understand the REACH values, and I will live up to them every day. I will follow all school rules so as to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals. I understand that I may lose privileges and have other disciplinary consequences if I break rules or do not live up to the REACH values.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

schools have the autonomy to make creative scheduling, curriculum, and instruction decisions. The flexibility to customize their programs to fit the needs of their particular communities is enabling these schools to deliver on their promises.

Because student populations vary, no one of these schools is exactly like another.

- APV has a dual-language model, by which all students—both native Spanish speakers and native English speakers—receive instruction from two teachers each day, one teaching in Spanish, the other in English. For example, students might read *Charlotte's Web* in Spanish in the morning and then write essays about the novel in English in the afternoon. Therefore, all students are receiving instruction in two languages as opposed to a pull-out model where only some students receive Spanish instruction.
- Amistad Academy places the strongest teachers with the students who are struggling the most—an atypical arrangement in public schools.
- At CCA, teachers form teams, creating a community of colleagues to support students struggling with academics, behavior, or both.
- At TIS, teachers are eschewing direct instruction in which teachers drive the pacing and classroom activity. Instead, they facilitate an individualized, student-directed learning process, in which students have more to say about what projects they work on and how long they work on them.
- Some of these schools offer unusual grade configurations to serve their communities' needs. CCA, which started with 248 students in grades K–3, now has 786 children in grades K–7, and, in addition, an eighth grade in the 2007–08 school year. Amistad Academy had been providing grades 5–8, but added kindergarten and ninth grade for the 2006–07 school

year with the intent of expanding to a full K–12 program. Alain Locke serves prekindergarten through eighth grade, a range not typically offered by traditional public school districts.

- Each school is intentional about its teaching approaches, but CCA, APV, TIS, and PAES all cite the research-based instructional practices they are explicitly implementing to support reading skills.

Principals of these seven schools have discovered that innovation may lead to better achievement outcomes, but not by itself. The standards these schools have set require top-notch instruction by high-quality teachers. Because low-income communities typically struggle to retain top-grade teachers,¹⁵ many of these schools work diligently to recruit new as well as retain existing teachers. At PAES and TIS, a number of current teachers started out at their schools as student teachers and found the environment welcoming and supportive enough to want to teach there once licensed. At Icahn Charter School, a teacher who began teaching history and geography as electives was encouraged to go back to school to become certified as a core teacher. He now teaches fourth grade at the school. CCA actually has its own teacher development program that trains both mid-career professionals and young adults from the community. Through this alternative licensing program, accredited by the state of Colorado, the school has been able to add to its teaching staff a former physicist, a former chemist, and a former stockbroker. Through the program, says principal Hernandez, novices “learn to become great teachers.”

Holding Themselves Accountable

Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools are authorized for a specific number of

years—typically five to 10 years at a time—and authorizers can shut a school down or decide not to renew a charter if the school does not perform adequately. As a result, these schools take accountability very seriously. For starters, each has a governing board to support and guide the school.

The governing board holds staff accountable for results and has the ability to fire the director or teachers if they fail to advance the school mission. Boards can make decisions quickly, which, as TIS principal Whitehouse explains, “allows them to be nimble.” When the school decided to expand from a school of 100 to a school of 200 over a five-year period, she recalls, the board wanted to be sure the school stayed true to its mission and could make the changes needed to handle more students. “There’s no big bureaucracy to work your way through,” Whitehouse says, “so you can make decisions that are in the best interest of children pretty quickly.”

Governing boards oversee policymaking and help develop school goals. Board members may represent business, education and community groups, and may be parents or, even, teachers, who cannot serve on traditional public school boards due to union constraints. Board members help to attract partnerships, raise money for their schools, and secure buildings and facilities. Further, the board oversees the fiscal health, management, and leadership of these schools, performing some functions of a streamlined school district administration. Boards at profiled schools average nine members, with one board having as few as five members and another as many as 19.

Because many charter schools receive less public funding than traditional public schools, one of the most important functions of a governing board is fund-raising. Charter schools operate under tremendous financial vulnerability. TIS, for example, does not receive any of the local tax funds that account for 47 percent of funding for other public schools in its district. In addition, unlike traditional public schools, charter-governed schools must cover their own facilities and transportation costs. District and state funding also are calculated in a manner that puts new charter schools at a disadvantage. Often a year’s allocation is based on the school’s attendance levels from the previous year. For a school that has recently added two or more grades to its program, using last year’s attendance numbers and budget will fall far short of providing what it needs.

To compensate for unpredictable cash flow, some charter schools form nonprofit 501c(3) organizations or operate under the umbrella of one, enabling them to receive grants from foundations, individuals, and other organizations. Charter school leaders sometimes find themselves in the position of having to sell the charter concept, either to political leaders or benefactors, to gain access to revenue streams. Board members at Amistad Academy had some success persuading the state legislature to increase funding for Connecticut charter schools, and the school was granted \$25 million in facility bond money to renovate a building and expand its program to grades K–12.

Continuous Professional Learning and Improvement

Standards are high for students and teachers alike at these schools. Teachers are held

accountable for meeting ambitious missions and goals, but at the same time they receive ongoing professional development and support.

- At Alain Locke, teacher collaboration time is built into the year-round schedule with a block of time reserved each week for professional development.
- At APV, during a weekly two-hour professional development period, prekindergarten staff participate in a team project meeting to plan lessons and share instructional strategies. The school's reading specialist and mathematics coordinator observe classes, provide feedback, model lessons for each teacher, and provide training. Teachers also are given time every day for planning and have opportunities to work on curriculum and instruction with both a reading specialist and a mathematics specialist.
- Icahn Charter School has a staff developer and three curriculum specialists on staff who, in addition to their other work, serve as coaches. For example, one coach might team-teach a class with a staff teacher while another works with an individual student who is struggling with an assignment. Teachers are required to submit lesson plans each Monday to the staff developer. This year, with five teachers new to the school, the coaches demonstrate successful lessons, provide feedback, and share approaches for addressing students' needs. All professional development efforts are carefully documented. (See fig. 10 on p. 29 for a teacher log that a writing coach from the New York City Writing Project, a community partnership to coach teachers on writing, uses as a tool to keep track of ongoing professional development work with teachers.)

These schools tend to offer teachers considerably more professional development and sup-

port than traditional public schools. Coaches and master teachers—high-quality, experienced teachers—help newer educators refine lessons, team-teach, and model instructional strategies. All seven charter schools support teachers by providing additional staffing, such as Title I mathematics and reading intervention specialists, who work with small groups of students having difficulty with academic skills.

The kind of support described above is one way these schools retain great teachers. Bonuses are another. Several of the schools—CCA, Icahn Charter School, and PAES—pay bonuses or merit pay for meeting student achievement goals, teacher attendance, and investing additional time in after-school tutoring, Saturday classes, and summer school. Administrators also select their staff carefully. Lennie Jones, principal of Alain Locke, explains that besides looking at an applicant's education background and credentials, he looks for new hires who are willing to put in the time and effort required to meet the school's goals. The school "may not be for everyone," Jones says. "We look for intelligent people with a heart for children who are looking to grow professionally." Once hired, teachers are observed, evaluated, and held to high standards. Unlike traditional public schools, charter school principals have the autonomy to fire or decide not to renew contracts if a teacher is not committed to the mission or meeting the standards for instruction. At CCA, principal Hernandez says he over-hires by four or five teachers each school year and keeps only the best, letting go by December "those that don't make it or buy in." At APV, when a new principal and governing board took over leadership, they developed a new dual-language program for all students and decided to fire all noncertified

Figure 10. Carl C. Icahn Charter School Teacher Consultant Log (Excerpt)

| NYC WRITING PROJECT | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Teacher Consultant Log | | | | |
| Teacher Consultant: _____ | | | | |
| School: Carl Icahn Charter School | | | | |
| Days on-site: Wednesdays in September | | | | |
| Date | Teacher | Type of activity | Purpose or focus | Notes |
| 9/6/05 | All Staff | Professional Development Sessions | AM session for upper (4 th – 6 th) grade teachers and PM session for lower (K – 3 rd) grade teachers on grammar instruction | Shared articles with suggestions for teaching grammar (see pd packet) |
| 9/14/05 | Ms. _____ * | Class Visit/Observation | To see new students adjusting to school situation | |
| | Ms. _____ | Class Visit/Observation | Note class set up and reflected on teacher's plans to fill classroom wall with students' writing. Teacher began with students interviewing a classmate. | Share checklist for evaluating a print rich literacy environment. |
| | Ms. _____ | Class Visit/Observation | Observe classroom; get of sense of how teacher is starting with writing; Students working on a choice of activities while teacher assess individual students; two children collaborate on a picture | |
| | Mrs. _____ | Class Visit/Observation | Observed group writing in preparation for prewriting a First Day of School story | Tchr. has high expectations for students. Will writing demands tire them out? |
| | Ms. _____ | Conversation | Issues around managing timing of activities for a class. | |
| | Ms. _____ | Conversation | Reviewed student writing samples of letter written to teacher; suggestion that we meet periodically to review writing progress of selected students | (see notes under Ms. _____) |
| | Ms. _____ | Conversation | Talked about scheduling writing time on Wednesdays for me to visit her class | |

* Names deleted to protect privacy.

teachers. This step meant that half the school's teaching staff was fired and replaced. (See fig. 11 on page 30 for APV's teacher report card, an excerpt of a tool that is used to evaluate teachers. The principal and administrators use this tool to evaluate teacher performance in a way that promotes ongoing learning for staff to meet expectations for high-quality teaching.)

All of these schools aim to create an environment for teachers that is supportive and

conducive to teaching. Teachers are not left alone to deal with challenging students. At APV, for example, a designated problem-solving team composed of teachers works, as needed, with individual teachers to strategize on how to address students' behavioral and academic issues. At Cesar Chavez, innovative hiring has helped create a community of experts to support classroom teachers: School staff includes an instructional coach for elementary and middle school, a lead tutor, a director of assessment, a school

Figure 11. Amigos Por Vida Charter School: Teacher Report Card (Excerpt)

| <u>Amigos por Vida-Friends for Life Public Charter School</u> |
|---|
| <p>There are 7 subjects to be evaluated and each subject is graded on the following scale. They are listed with the methods of evaluation.</p> <p>Excellent – 4 points Above Average – 3 points Average – 2 point Needs Improvement – 0 points</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Student learning (weighted double)<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Classroom observation.b. Quality Student workc. Student results on standardized tests.d. Evidence of writing across the curriculume. Variety of teacher created assessments usedf. Evidence of effective questioning/higher order thinkingg. Quarter Exam datah. Quarterly reflection*2. Contribution to school discipline and school culture<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Observed and documented implementation of behavior plan in a consistent manner or other measures that contribute to positive behavior.b. Classroom observation.c. Uniform policy implementedd. Positive relations with studentse. Motivates students to learnf. Posting grades on student folders/progress reportsg. Hosting field lesson meetings with parentsh. Organizing field lessons with teami. Attendance of students on teamj. Quarterly reflection*3. Homeroom achievement<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Documented communication with parents.b. Follow-up with requests or referrals regarding your homeroom students.c. Attendance of homeroom studentsd. Grades of homeroom students relative to their potential.e. Parental attendance at Open Houses, report card night/parent teacher conferences.f. Quarterly reflection*4. Extra effort<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Student tutoringb. Extra-curricular activitiesc. Support Team Leaders by contributingd. Other extra work for the causee. Saturday School attendancef. Quarterly reflection*5. Professionalism<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Attendanceb. Dressc. Working with other facultyd. Compliance: Turning in required paperwork/computer work on time. Examples include grades, attendance, special education paperwork and other information requested. |

psychologist, a speech therapist, a cross-grade special education team, and a prevention specialist to coordinate family support services.

Several of these schools have principals who serve as instructional leaders. “It’s my job to help the teacher figure out how to make each child succeed,” says principal Whitehouse of TIS. “When a teacher is having difficulty figuring out what to do for a child, we will sit down and brainstorm together.” She observes teachers daily, spending time in classrooms and providing feedback to teachers. One teacher on staff had worked for 39 years in Catholic schools before moving to TIS. “My other school was seven-tenths of a mile from my house. I could walk to school,” says the teacher. “Now I travel 55 miles a day round-trip to get here. But I just love this program, even though it is probably the most difficult teaching I’ve done in all those years.” Another teacher, new to the profession, says Whitehouse helped her get off to a good start in her classroom: “[During] my first year of teaching she was there every single step of the way. She held my hand through the entire process.”

Conclusion

The populations of students attending the schools profiled in this guide are distinctive in their levels of need. These students reside in urban communities, and many have limited English fluency. Many come from poor families, and many are African-American or Hispanic. Their neighborhood schools are unsafe and suffer a chronic lack of resources. Frustrated and unhappy that their children’s academic and developmental needs were not being met, fami-

lies in these communities have joined educators and philanthropists to create innovative schools dedicated to ensuring student success.

Some readers of this guide, particularly teachers or administrators working in charter or traditional public schools, may wonder whether any of these strategies have “cross-over” potential for other schools. The descriptive research process on which this guide is based suggests ways to do things that leaders and staff at the featured schools have found to be helpful and practical how-to guidance. But it is not the kind of experimental research that can yield valid causal claims about what works. Thus, readers should judge for themselves the merits of these practices based on their understanding of why such practices should work, how they fit the local context, and what happens when they actually try them. Also, readers should understand that these descriptions do not constitute an endorsement of specific practices or products.

That said, the successes of these schools provide an impetus to look closely at how they go about the business of educating all children and closing achievement gaps.

These schools share a sense of urgency: To a one, they are *on a mission* to improve the future for students who have not had many opportunities, and they are of the mind-set that there is no time to waste. Each is staying true to an original, formal mission to help their students achieve and, uniformly, these schools *provide the necessary support* to help each student meet high standards. They do this work in a *positive school culture* that emphasizes student achievements and makes expectations clear. Schools profiled in this guide *partner with*

their students' families in multiple ways, from requiring parental signatures on homework to offering adult education classes. School leaders are *innovative* about their approaches across the board, taking care to notice what their students and staff need—from longer school days to year-round school schedules. Leaders hold themselves *accountable* and also are held accountable by governing boards that can fire principals and teachers who are not following through with the school's mission. These schools provide ongoing *professional development* and other support for teachers, which help to retain high-quality staff in communities that often struggle to hold on to top-notch teachers.

While achievement levels for students in these schools do indeed outpace those of students in neighboring public schools, there are also more-nuanced indicators of success at these charters, each of which may have implications for other public schools:

- ***These schools offer lessons about individualizing curriculum.*** The schools in this guide use approaches that specifically meet the needs of their student populations. They group students in innovative ways, sometimes offering unusual grade ranges, and even clustering students developmentally rather than by age. (TIS students learn in multiage classrooms rather than being separated out by grade-level groupings.) Traditional schools can learn new strategies for tailor-making their programs to teach student by student.
- ***High teacher accountability raises student achievement.*** The seven schools profiled here have moderate to low percentages of students in special education programs, ranging from less than 5 percent to 12 percent. One reason for this may be that teachers

work together to support students with special needs.¹⁶ Teachers are trained to think, “It is my responsibility to make sure this child learns.”¹⁷ These schools proactively provide all students with individualized instructional support, using special education designation as a last resort. Additionally, both schools that are serving high numbers of English language learners use a highly collaborative dual-language approach, enabling teachers to hone in on academic problems and identify whether they are language- or learning-related.¹⁸ School reform advocates will want to consider ways to nurture this shift in thinking, from asking teachers to impart material to holding them responsible for student success, particularly when students enter school performing below grade-level.

- ***Teachers are supported to meet high standards.*** These schools each have master teachers on staff to model lessons for newer instructors. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate or team-teach, and, at some schools, they receive bonus pay when achievement goals are met. Their shared sense of pride and the knowledge that they are having a real impact serves as additional reward. If underserved urban districts want to attract and retain high-caliber teachers, they should consider offering high levels of professional development in addition to other rewards for a job well done.
- ***These charter schools are places where theory and practice meet.*** Free from district and state mandates about instructional minutes and textbook choices, several of these schools are explicit in their use of research-based teaching and assessment practices. Although sometimes faced with skepticism from colleagues in the field, leaders at a few of these schools have implemented curricula that had never been used to teach low-income students in urban schools. Other schools in the profiled group also have

raised the bar high but use more traditional teaching methods. Their successes in raising student achievement levels demonstrate that historically underserved students can and do master high-level material, whether a school uses traditional (e.g., direct instruction) or more innovative (e.g., project-based learning) pedagogy.

- ***These schools share common constraints.***

These schools are united by a common determination to meet their students' needs by doing whatever it takes. But they also share similar challenges. Responsible for financing their own school transportation and buildings, these schools face major financial struggles with each new school year. School reform advocates committed to expanding public school options will want to consider ways to support schools like these, which offer an important alternative for students and their families. Standards are high for teachers as well, and working at a fledgling charter school would not work for every teacher. Hours are long, but there are also rewards. Many school directors give staff bonuses for working extra hours and bringing student achievement levels up. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate across departments with master teachers working closely with these new educators. Further, in those schools there is a shared sense of pride among students and teachers when they accomplish benchmark goals because students know they have worked hard to earn their marks, and teachers can see the impact of their efforts.

- ***These schools make learning a priority.***

Readers of this guide may conclude that it

would be impossible for a traditional public school to develop a cohesive staff willing to work the long hours each day as well as work extra days to ensure student achievement. It is easier, without question, for charter schools to achieve this task. However, having a highly qualified and unified teaching staff is certainly possible at non-charter schools. Those committed to education equity must consider what is needed to ensure that *all* schools, especially those at the losing end of the achievement gap, have such dedicated teachers. School reform advocates must take note of policies and practices that either inhibit or support developing staffs like these and must make decisions accordingly.

One of the more insidious myths about education is that students who have traditionally been characterized as at risk cannot manage a rigorous curriculum and that, if pushed too hard, they will drop out of school. The achievement outcomes of these seven profiled schools refute that belief, demonstrating that when presented with a demanding academic curriculum, high expectations, and the support to excel, students rise to meet, and often exceed, the bar. With solid support and research-based teaching and assessment approaches, these traditionally underserved learners can meet the challenge. It may even be possible, based on the outcomes of these seven charters, that *all* public schools—in affluent or low-income communities alike—can learn from the individualized, innovative, and committed work that can happen when theory meets practice.



Part II

Profiles of Charter Schools Highlighted In Part I

Alain Locke Charter Academy

Amigos Por Vida—Friends for Life Public Charter School

Amistad Academy

Carl C. Icahn Charter School

Cesar Chavez Academy

The Intergenerational School

Pan-American Elementary Charter School

Alain Locke Charter Academy

Chicago

| School Profile: Selected Variables ^a | |
|---|---|
| Year First Chartered | 1999 |
| Grades Served | Pre-K–8 |
| Enrollment | 505 |
| Student Ethnicity ^b | 94% African-American 5% White 1% Hispanic |
| Special Education | 12% |
| Free or Reduced-price Lunch ^b | 89% |
| Annual Cost per Student | \$7,000 |

^a Unless otherwise indicated, these data are reported by the school and are for the school year 2006–07.

^b These data are drawn from Alain Locke Charter Academy school report card for 2005–06 posted on the Illinois State Board of Education Web site.

Mission and Founding

On Chicago’s West Side, families in neighborhoods including East Garfield Park, North Lawndale, and Austin now have access to a school where academic rigor and what staff refer to as “absolute excellence” are expected. Acting on the belief that all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, can succeed if given quality educational opportunities, Patrick Ryan, Jr., founder of Inner-City Teaching Corp (ICTC), opened Alain Locke Charter Academy in 1999. Ryan maintains, “Equality is a hollow promise without equal access to quality education. Despite all the rhetoric, we are on the verge of leaving another generation of urban students behind.”

Named in honor of the first African-American Rhodes scholar, Alain Locke is guided by the principle of absolute excellence and dedicated to producing globally competitive students. Students in this predominantly African-American community have historically been underserved by inadequate traditional public schools. Even after Alain Locke opened, students did not immediately show academic progress.

While the school had the bedrock of a spacious and well-maintained facility, missing in its early years were the necessary focus, discipline, and

leadership to establish a stable and learning-focused environment. The need for change became evident in 2002, when Alain Locke’s pioneer class reached third grade and first took Illinois’ standardized tests. The percentage of students reaching proficient levels was in the single digits. Soon thereafter, the school’s board hired a new principal. Under the leadership of Lennie Jones, the school blossomed. By 2005, over three-quarters of Alain Locke students were meeting or exceeding standards on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), scoring 74 percent proficient or above in reading and 84 percent proficient or above in mathematics.

Alain Locke’s transformation from a struggling school into a success story is testament to ICTC’s dedication and mission “to transform education in underserved communities and to empower children in urban schools.” All students, parents, and staff sign a contract that focuses on excellence as an expectation for all members of the school community. According to Claire Hartfield, the ICTC chief of staff, this expectation is a statement “that our students will not only be among the best in our community, but they will be excellent absolutely, across the board, and able to compete citywide, statewide, nationally.”

School Operations and Educational Program

Alain Locke opened in 1999 with prekindergarten through first-grade classes and has expanded one grade level per year, with the original cohort completing eighth grade in 2007. In 2006–07, the school served 505 students. Each grade level has two classes of 25 students. Eighty-nine percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and admission to the school is based on a lottery. Alain Locke operates with an extended school day, which starts at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 5 p.m. Initially, the school also adopted an extended-year calendar in which the school operated from September through July. In 2005, the school switched to a year-round schedule, with four 10-week quarters separated by three-week intersession breaks. That change was made, in part, to reduce teacher burnout associated with the school's longer teaching days and, in part, to minimize the learning loss that typically occurs over a long summer break.

When principal Jones arrived at Alain Locke in 2001, her first challenge was to create an environment in which academic excellence was taken seriously. She determined that more structure was needed if the school was to develop a culture in which, as Jones puts it, "It's cool to be an academic achiever." Today, school staff encourage students to carry their independent reading books with them while they walk around the school, which enables Jones to chat with students about their chosen texts. The safe and welcoming school climate allows students to focus on academics and helps them develop a strong work ethic. As evidenced by the school's 93 percent attendance rate, students look forward to coming to school.

Character education, based on the seven principles of *Nguzo Saba* from the Kwanza tradition, is embedded in the curriculum. Ninety-nine

percent of the student body is African-American, and choosing culturally relevant practices is part of Alain Locke's success. Every week there is an all-school *harambee* (i.e., a Swahili term for "pulling together all at once") meeting, at which students, dressed in their uniform of white shirts and navy pants, line up in a double circle to sing and celebrate achievements. Meetings begin with student renditions of the "Pledge of Allegiance," "The Star-Spangled Banner," and "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," and they conclude with the traditional harambee call to unity.

To help them see the connection between behavior and the ability to do their best work, students receive citizenship grades along with academic grades. To maintain an orderly learning environment, every classroom adheres to the school's clear and consistent discipline system of warnings, removal of privileges and, then, communication with parents.

Since 2002, Alain Locke has successfully established a standards-based curriculum in five core areas: reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. The school's extended day allows regular instruction in art, music, Spanish, PE, and technology. In addition, Friday afternoon enrichment clubs give students the opportunity to partake in activities ranging from additional language classes (including Swahili and Japanese) and performing arts to sports and games (such as word play and chess).

Starting in first grade, students use the computer-based Accelerated Reader program. Students who perform well on Accelerated Reader tests receive a congratulatory reading certificate. Jones, whose office is lined with picture books, maintains an open-door policy that allows students to interrupt her during any meeting in order to get a reading certificate signed. The assistant principal, Gloria Woodson, runs a club called Reading Angels, in which

fourth- to eighth-graders read to younger students and run the school's bookstore. Literacy instruction is not limited to formal instruction in core classes. For example, in an art class during which students work with clay, the teacher infuses the lesson with topically appropriate vocabulary words, such as *slab*, *score*, and *slip*.

Alain Locke's mathematics goal is for all eighth-graders to graduate proficient in algebra 1, a high school gatekeeper course. In K–6 classrooms, teachers supplement the Everyday Math curriculum and basic skills review with Accelerated Math computer lessons. In seventh grade, students take pre-algebra, moving on to algebra in eighth grade.

Experience-based learning is another element of Alain Locke's curriculum. The school encourages teachers to take their students off campus to have meaningful learning experiences, and it provides transportation and other funds to do so. Hartfield describes a trip to the Argonne Laboratory as "inspiring. ... At least one of the kids came out of it saying 'I know what I want to do now. I want to be a scientist.'" Says Jones, "We feel that if children have rich exposure at an early age and continue to have that exposure, they're going to make the connections they need to perform well on things like standard[ized] tests, as well as in their classes."

Explicit teacher training on standards-based lesson planning for heterogeneous classes and the availability of self-paced computer programs for students eliminate the need for Alain Locke to operate a separate gifted program. The school also helps connect students in need of more advanced learning opportunities to a fast-paced algebra course offered by the University of Illinois, which several seventh-graders take for high school credit. There are also special programs for students who need additional support (approximately 10 percent of the

students have individualized education plans). In pre-K through third grade, a teacher associate in each classroom provides students with personalized help during class, and in the older grades community volunteers tutor students. Additionally, Alain Locke has created a buddy system, in which every staff member adopts a student who is experiencing challenges and works one-on-one with that student to reach specific goals.

The use of both formal and informal assessments helps teachers develop the capacity to maximize learning for individual students. Alain Locke employs Learning First, a district-approved assessment system that provides feedback three times a year. Teachers write progress reports every five weeks and send home report cards at the end of each 10-week quarter. The year-round calendar also allows teachers time to reflect on their practice and modify lessons based on analyzed data to help students master specific skills or content areas. Jones says a year-round schedule, with every 10 weeks of school followed by three weeks of vacation, sends the message to students, "When it's time to work, work hard, and then you can relax and regroup."

External Partnerships

Although Alain Locke now serves multiple neighborhoods, it was conceived to focus on the needs of East Garfield Park. As such, it was, and remains, part of a network of organizations working to positively affect this particular neighborhood. Another ICTC-sponsored organization in that network is the Family Resource and Learning Center, which operates within the Alain Locke facility to provide a variety of family-oriented programming, including parent-and-child-together classes and GED preparation classes for adults. Offered four days a week for both Alain Locke families and those

from the broader community, these programs reflect ICTC's mission to provide "seamless educational opportunities for families" in a "one-stop education source."

Community partnerships make Alain Locke's experiential education programs possible and bring in much-needed resources. The school works with such external groups as the Chicago Children's Choir and the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance. A relationship with the Chicago-based Aon Corporation provides the upper grades with tutors; the Mead Witter Foundation funded the construction of a state-of-the-art science lab; and Chicago Communities In Schools connects Alain Locke with such companies as LensCrafters, which provides glasses and vision care for students in need.

Parent and family involvement is a key contributor to student achievement at Alain Locke. A parent's role begins with signing the commitment to excellence contract, with which families pledge to maintain high expectations for their children, to help their children with daily homework, to make sure their children attend school regularly, and to communicate regularly with school staff. By signing the contract, parents agree to uphold the school's belief that, in collaboration with the school, parents are responsible for shaping the attitudes and behavior of their children. Alain Locke makes a concerted effort to educate parents about academic standards. At the school's open house, parents learn about each teacher's system for communication about homework and citizenship. The administration and teachers organize meetings to explain expectations for third and sixth grades, which are critical benchmark years evaluated by state exams, and to show parents sample test questions. Voynell Foster, the parent and community liaison, touches base with families every day at dismissal, runs an after-school Girl Scout program, and cre-

ates enrichment activities for families. Foster explains her own commitment when she says, "Every child deserves an opportunity to get the *best* education."

Governing for Accountability

Alain Locke's 11-member board of directors draws representatives from leaders in both the business and the education world. Originally its role was to bring resources into the school and lend credibility to the start-up venture at a time when the concept of charter schools was new to Illinois. Since then, the board has evolved to address the school's needs as it has grown and, now, is trying to institutionalize processes. Supportive of the school leadership, the board gives the principal and the assistant principal the autonomy to make education policy and enact decisions in line with the school's strategic plan. In 2004, Alain Locke completed the charter renewal process with the state of Illinois approving continuation of the school's program for another five years.

Since Jones has taken the helm, she has worked hard to rally staff behind a common mission. Prior to each new school year, she conducts a retreat that gives staff an opportunity to reexamine the mission and review procedures and policies. "We address all the issues together," says Assistant Principal Woodson. "I think that makes a big difference in terms of having a well-run organization where everybody is on the same page and working towards the same goal." Both Jones and Woodson taught for many years in Chicago prior to joining Alain Locke, and they work with teachers on a regular basis to improve instruction. Teachers recognize and appreciate the supportive environment in which they work. One teacher notes, "The staff is young and vibrant and nice to work with ... everybody shares." Ongoing staff development

time allows staff to analyze data from informal and formal assessments together and make plans accordingly. Teachers meet weekly for professional development.

When hiring, Jones looks for more than academic qualifications. “We look for intelligent people who have a heart for children and are looking to grow professionally,” she says. Alain Locke teachers earn salaries that are on par with those paid by the local district, but school leaders would like to raise salaries to make them even more competitive. “The quality of your teachers is really the key, and by quality I don’t just mean teachers’ educational background, but a whole package,” says Hartfield. In addition to competi-

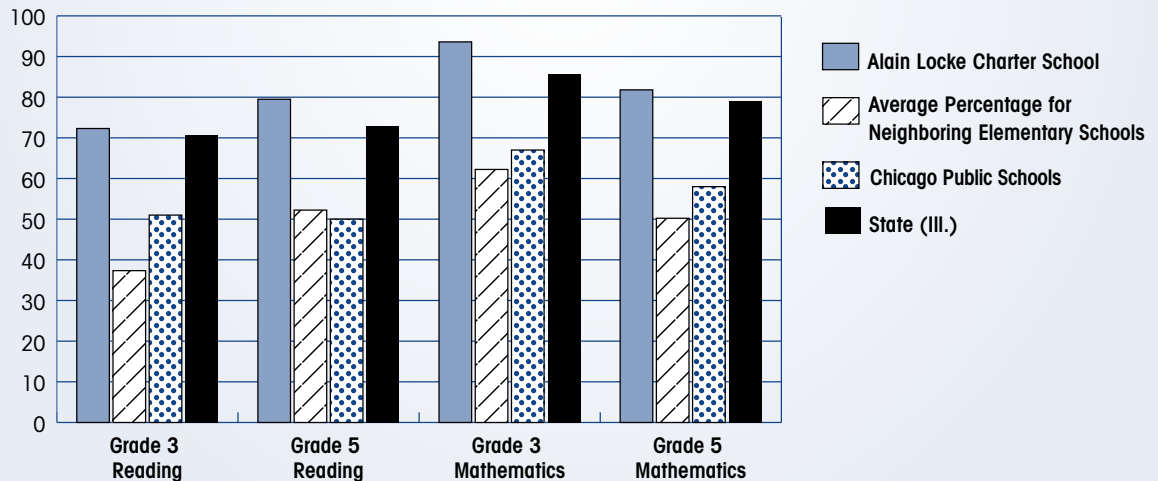
tive salaries, some important teacher perks include the use of teacher associates in the lower grades, a strong collaborative staff, and support for experience-based learning.

In the *2004–05 Chicago Public Schools Charter Schools Performance Report*,¹⁹ Alain Locke earned “high” ratings for financial practices and compliance. The school receives about \$6,000–\$6,500 per student from public sources, including per-pupil state funds, Title I money, and other state aid for low-income populations. Private funds and donations contribute another \$1,000 per student every year.

Student Achievement at Alain Locke Charter Academy

- Since 2002, Alain Locke has made significant strides in raising student achievement, culminating in a March 2007 Chicago Public Schools “Exemplary Achievement Award” for four years of consecutive gains on state testing.
- From 2001 to 2005, Alain Locke posted the highest test score gains of all Chicago public elementary schools. During this period, reading achievement for grades 3–8 increased from 9.4 percent proficient or above in reading in 2001–02 to 61.6 percent in 2004–05, a gain of 52.2 percentage points on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).
- In 2004–05, Alain Locke third- and fifth-graders outperformed students at neighboring elementary schools and the district on the ITBS in reading and mathematics.
- As shown in figure 12, in 2005–06, Alain Locke third- and fifth-graders outperformed students at neighboring elementary schools and at the district level, and they performed about the same as, or slightly better than, students at the state level on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in reading and mathematics.

Figure 12. Percentage of Alain Locke Students Meeting or Exceeding Standards on 2005–06 ISAT Reading and Mathematics



Source: Interactive Illinois Report Card 2006 and Illinois State Board of Education, 2006 Illinois School Profile

Amigos Por Vida —Friends for Life Public Charter School

Houston

| School Profile: Selected Variables ^a | |
|---|---|
| Year First Chartered | 1999 |
| Grades Served | Pre-K–6 |
| Enrollment | 374 |
| Student Ethnicity ^b | 98.6% Hispanic 0.7% African-American 0.7% White |
| Special Education ^c | 5% |
| Free or Reduced-price Lunch ^b | 99.7% |
| English Language Learners | 95.4% |
| Annual Cost per Student | \$8,829 |

^a Unless otherwise indicated, these data are reported by the school and are for the school year 2006–07.

^b These data are drawn from the Amigos Por Vida—Friends for Life Public Charter School school report card for 2005–06 posted on Texas Education Agency Web site.

^c These data are reported online for 2005–06 at <http://www.schoolmatters.com>.

Mission and Founding

Amigos Por Vida—Friends for Life Public Charter School (APV) emerged from a tumultuous beginning to become a school that has raised achievement for its mostly immigrant students. Carlos Villagrana, the school’s third principal and a primary driver of its turnaround, describes the school’s work as, “We’re in the business of empowering.” APV’s commitment to empowerment extends beyond its student population and beyond those families living in the 535-unit mixed-income apartment complex in which the school is located. It embraces all of the families living in the broader Houston neighborhood it serves, irrespective of whether their children attend APV.

In 1999, the school that is now APV opened as *Escuela de Reyes*, or School of the Kings, under the charter authority of the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Early mismanagement and the school’s failure to provide a quality education led to a 2001–02 audit by the TEA, which threatened to close the school. It was due to the diligence of staff at the apartment complex management company that the school was saved. Recognizing the need for a good school in the neighborhood, they helped recruit a new

board and convinced the local community to support the board’s efforts to get the school back on track.

The new five-member board issued a tri-fold mandate to rebuild the school. It insisted that the school, renamed by a second principal, create a dual-language program for all students, replace all noncertified teachers with certified teachers, and implement internal controls, including a more accurate accounting system for all finances and operations. A controller was hired to ensure sound financial operations of the school. In December 2003, Villagrana took over as the third principal and set out to rehabilitate the school in accordance with the board’s agenda.

When Villagrana started at APV, only 50 percent of its students were earning passing rates on Texas’s annual statewide assessments. Today, APV serves prekindergarten three-year-olds through students in the sixth grade, and 85 and 99 percent of its students are earning passing rates on state reading and mathematics exams, respectively. As Villagrana set about reforming APV, he did so with a dual vision for what the school could be. First, because there is tremendous need in the community, he wanted APV to serve as a safe resource center for students, families,

and the local community. Second, he wanted to honor the students' heritage by instituting a dual-language program that promotes fluency in both Spanish and English.

The area APV serves had not had a school within walking distance for decades. APV was the first charter school in the largely immigrant Gulfton neighborhood, but today there are two additional charter schools in the area. There is strong collaboration, rather than competition, between these schools, and one of the other school's directors sits on the APV board. In addition, APV has helped change the neighborhood in which it is located. Board member Omar Velez says, "This is a high-risk community," and five to six years ago, "You wouldn't walk here." Villagrana has made major strides in creating a safer environment by reaching out to the teens in the neighborhood. Today, many neighborhood youths, including alumni and teens from the apartment complex, volunteer at all three schools for such events as Earth Day cleanup.

School Operations and Educational Program

APV occupies four buildings within the large apartment complex. The classrooms are converted two- and three-bedroom apartments, contributing to the cozy, family feel of the school. Having a bathroom in every classroom means that students can go to the bathroom as the teacher continues with lessons. The school converted the apartment complex's clubhouse as its administration building, and two APV teachers are certified to teach swimming in the complex swimming pool.

Of the 374 students attending APV, 99 percent are Hispanic, 97 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 95 percent are English language learners. But within this group, there

is a lot of diversity, with about 50 percent of student families hailing from Mexico and 50 percent from Central American countries, such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. While 57 percent of the student body has been in the United States for more than five years, 17 percent relocated to the United States three to four years ago, and 13 percent moved here within the past one to two years.

Students can start attending APV as three-year-olds in its prekindergarten program. These children have one teacher for their full day of classes; 90 percent of these students are taught in Spanish and 10 percent in English. The dual-language immersion program starts at the next level (prekindergarten for three- and four-year-olds) and extends through sixth grade. In 2006–07, prekindergarten through fifth-grade students began learning through a dual-language immersion program and grades 6 and higher began receiving a different model, consisting of content area classes in English, along with Spanish language enrichment classes. For the majority of APV students, then, half the school day takes place in Spanish and half the day takes place in English. In pre-K immersion through second grade, reading and English language arts are taught in both languages, mathematics and science are taught in English, and social studies is taught in Spanish. For third through sixth grade, reading and English language arts are taught in both languages, while mathematics, science, and social studies are taught in English with sheltered instruction, that is, the teaching occurs in English, but support is given in Spanish.

According to Alicia Garza, the English as a second language (ESL) teacher for kindergarten, the full-day prekindergarten and kindergarten programs make a huge difference, as students learn to read and write at a younger age. In addition, the dual-language program helps the school efficiently differentiate between the needs of

English language learners and special education students. If a student is struggling in English, staff can evaluate his or her performance in Spanish to assess whether the problem results from a language barrier or from a learning disability. Thus, although the school provides special education services, it finds that only 5 percent of the students qualify. Teachers also laud the dual-language program's two-teacher model. Prekindergarten teacher Hazel DeLaFuente explains that the process of collaborating with a co-teacher lends itself to more creative lesson plans, activity ideas, and professional support.

The school day starts with homework support at 7 a.m. and breakfast at 7:20 a.m. After school, there is a tutorial and enrichment program that runs from 3:15–5:45 p.m., which helps working parents who cannot pick up their children at the end of the school day. During this time, teachers work with groups of no more than 12 children in tutorials to help them succeed academically. The enrichment program is diverse, ranging, for example, from choir, dance, and art to nutrition and computer science. Underscoring the success of the after-school program, the school's fifth-graders entered and won the Hewlett-Packard Robotics Competition in 2005–06. APV also infuses information about college into its program in a variety of ways, including naming classrooms after universities. Students represent their homeroom university in monthly celebrations during which they compete in activities, such as designing the best college banner or singing their college cheer the loudest. School staff also take students on field trips to local colleges. At one point, APV took all third-grade students and their families to visit the University of Houston because none of the students or their parents had ever before been on a college campus. Most years, APV offers an eight-week summer school in June and July that is open to all students, but is required for students at risk of being held back.

APV follows the same school-year schedule as its local district. Students interested in attending the school must complete an application and are then selected by lottery. Preference goes to siblings of enrolled students,²⁰ and there is currently a wait list for prekindergarten and kindergarten. Seven staff members, including Principal Villagrana, send their children to APV.

To bolster the bilingual school environment, APV has adopted a language-of-the-week program, whereby each week everyone (including staff) agrees to try speaking the same language—either Spanish or English—outside of class in common areas. Nonnative-Spanish-speaking staff commented that this program allows them to learn from their students and helps them empathize with the struggles faced by students who are English language learners. Native-Spanish-speaking staff praise the program for giving them an opportunity to serve as role models for being proud to speak two languages. “We come from the same background, [as many of our students], so we know how it is for them,” says registrar Laura Lara. One teacher recalls having a student point to her and say proudly to a friend, “She’s bilingual, like me.” One parent told the school nurse that APV reminded her of Mexico because of the Spanish being spoken, but that her son’s ability to come home and speak English makes her feel like he attends a private school.

“We’ve developed our own curriculum around the needs of the kids,” Villagrana says. Two coordinators, one for mathematics and one for reading, help teachers by crafting curriculum, developing resource libraries, aiding with lesson plans, and working with individual students. The reading coach meets with the Spanish teachers every Wednesday and with the English teachers every Thursday to review lesson plans and brainstorm strategies for improvement. The mathematics coordinator evaluates a specific

standard every Friday and determines whether students are ready to move forward.

Using its own internal assessments, APV collects and analyzes data regularly. Assistant Principal Silvia Trinh explains to students that the testing is important because it serves as “a safety net” for them, but she also reassures them that the testing “doesn’t define you.” She encourages them to be persistent in their efforts to demonstrate their knowledge of a particular subject, but reminds them that the school cares about who they are more broadly.

Family Involvement and External Partnerships

Parents were instrumental in the turnaround of APV, and they continue to devote time and effort to making the school a clean, safe, and beautiful place in which to learn (e.g., by repairing the playground, planting a garden, painting the buildings). Regular communication between school staff and families contributes to the school’s attendance rate of above 97 percent. Because many students live in the apartments surrounding the school, administrators can walk down the street to meet with parents and find out why their children are not in class. Similarly, most parents pick up their children from school, which gives them frequent face-to-face contact with teachers. There are two formal school-parent conferences a year, but if a student is struggling, the school informs the parents and convenes a meeting in which school staff, students, and parents sign a contract stating what their responsibilities are in helping the student succeed. A regular bilingual newsletter helps APV keep in touch with parents about more general school issues.

In conjunction with the school’s parent-teacher organization, APV also hosts free enrichment

classes for parents on the first Thursday of every month on topics that range from nutrition to violence prevention. There are also reading, writing, science, and math nights for parents at which students present their work and teachers model lessons and expectations for students, so families learn how to support their children in school. The full-time school nurse, Marisol Villegas, treats entire families as well as other community members; she also arranges vision and dentistry screenings, free flu shots, and free mammograms, and she coordinates preventative health-care fairs. The school asks parents to volunteer 10 hours of their time per year and also concretely shows the value it places on parent input in other ways. For example, when the school was debating about whether to add grade levels, staff surveyed the fifth-grade parents. Based on parents’ clear interest in expanding the school, APV then added the sixth grade.

Key community partnerships also have influenced the school’s success. The DePelchin Children’s Center, a local nonprofit social services agency, offers parenting classes at APV, while Houston Community College pays for and sends a teacher to provide ESL classes for parents two nights a week. The Gulf Coast Literacy Center gives ESL, computer, and GED preparation courses, and Head Start provides an extra prekindergarten teacher. One private school donated over 2,000 books to the APV library, and the Harris County Department of Education’s Cooperative for After-School Enrichment (CASE) helps support the before- and after-school tutorials.

Governing for Accountability

The five-member APV leadership team, which meets weekly, includes the principal, assistant principal, reading specialist, mathematics specialist, and controller. Villagrana stresses that staff

commitment to the school's mission, parent and student dedication to success, and the school's ability to adapt are what make APV thrive. Reflecting on his time at the helm of APV, Villagrana says, "This is a marathon and I've come in sprinting. We've been fortunate to recruit a dedicated staff, and that makes all the difference."

Formal professional development meetings take place every Thursday from 3–5 p.m., but Villagrana makes it a point to visit at least three classrooms daily and to collect lesson plans weekly to help create a professional culture among the staff. The school encourages collaboration and often sends teachers to trainings with the expectation that when they return they will share the new knowledge with everyone else. Last year APV began using Teacher Report Cards that incorporate incentives, such as extra pay for high-attendance rates, and require teachers to develop portfolios that showcase student learning and school service. The school's in-house problem-solving team, composed of selected teachers and the school counselor, provides a forum to discuss and troubleshoot any student-related concerns. For example, if a teacher is having difficulty with a particular student, the team will offer strategies and resources for the specific situation. Teachers earn salaries equal to those offered by the Houston Independent School District and can earn bonuses for high classroom attendance rates, conducting home

visits, performing well (as indicated on the school's teacher report card), and for campus-wide achievement on state testing. In addition, there is a stipend for ELL teachers that all teachers receive because all are ELL-certified.

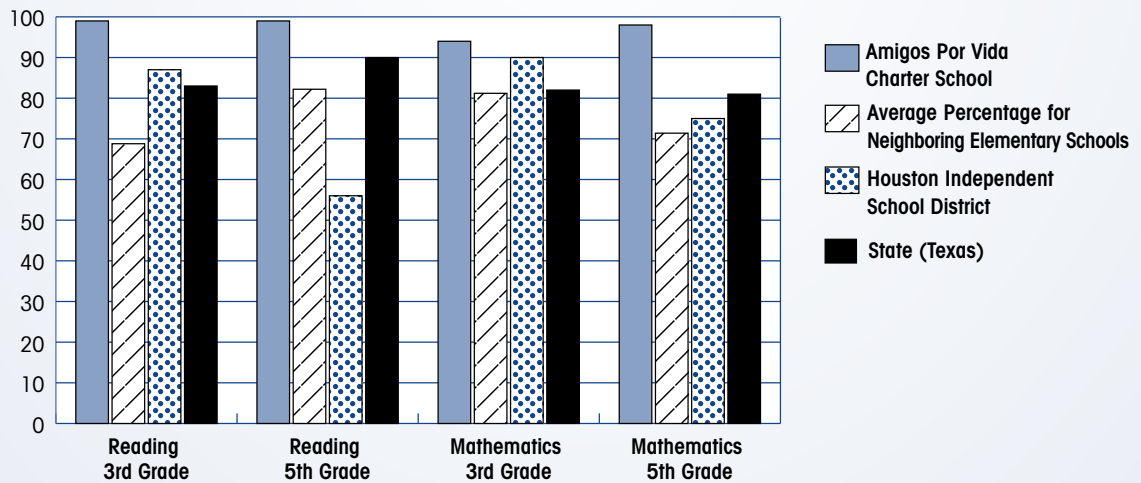
When Villagrana joined APV, the school was cash-strapped, he says. But thanks, in part, to the principal and the controller's intensive line-by-line scrutiny of the school budget and two successful federal grant applications (i.e., Reading First and Title I School Improvement grants), the school has become financially solvent. Just over a quarter of the budget comes directly from grants while the state contributes \$6,436 of the \$8,829 per-student cost. APV also receives a prekindergarten expansion grant for high-need communities through the Texas Education Agency that enables it to offer a prekindergarten class for three-year-olds and another for four-year-olds. The school currently leases its buildings from the apartment complex owner, but has launched a capital campaign in hopes of acquiring a permanent facility of its own.

The same five-member board of directors that helped resurrect the school continues to oversee it. The board set conditions for recreating the school and ensures that past mistakes are not repeated. In 2004, the state renewed APV's charter for another three years. The school will go through the renewal process again during the 2007–08 school year.

Student Achievement at Amigos Por Vida (APV)

- In 2006–07, APV received the Governor’s Excellence Award as a high-poverty school that performed in the top quartile on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).
- For the last three years, APV has made adequate yearly progress and was rated “academically acceptable” under the Texas 2006 school accountability rating system.
- In 2004–05, 85 percent of APV third- and fifth-graders met the TAKS reading standard in the first and second administration of the exam,* and more than 99 percent of third-graders met the standard for the mathematics exam. Looking at results for the entire school, APV exceeded the performance in mathematics and reading of neighboring schools serving similar populations of students.
- As shown in figure 13, in 2006, 99 percent of APV third-graders met TAKS standards in reading (for the first administration) and mathematics, outperforming students in neighboring schools, as well as at the district and state levels.

Figure 13. Percentage of APV Students Who Met Standards on 2005–06 TAKS Reading (First Administration) and Mathematics



Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2005–06 Campus Performance

* In Texas, there are multiple test administrations for third-grade and fifth-grade reading, and fifth-grade mathematics. Only students who do not pass the first time take a second administration. These test scores are used for promotion to the next grade level, so students are given multiple opportunities to pass. However, there is only one administration of the third-grade mathematics test because this test is not used for promotion.

Amistad Academy

New Haven, Conn.

| School Profile: Selected Variables ^a | |
|---|--|
| Year First Chartered | 1999 |
| Grades Served | K, 5–9 |
| Enrollment | 405 |
| Student Ethnicity ^b | 61% African-American 31% Hispanic 2% White |
| Special Education | Less than 5% |
| Free or Reduced-price Lunch ^b | 84% |
| Annual Cost per Student | \$11,000 |

^a Unless otherwise indicated, these data are reported by the school and are for the school year 2006–07.

^b These data are drawn from the Amistad Academy school report card for 2005–06 posted on Connecticut State Department of Education Web site.

Mission and Founding

In 1998, a group of Yale law students began studying urban education issues and became inspired by civil rights leader and mathematics educator Bob Moses, who views the realms of civil rights and mathematics education as intertwined: “The absence of mathematics literacy in urban and rural communities throughout this country is an issue as urgent as the lack of registered black voters in Mississippi was in 1961.”²¹ Inspired by Moses’ words and work, the Yale students concluded that closing the achievement gap is the civil rights issue of today. In exploring how they could help to close achievement gaps in Connecticut, they decided that the most powerful way would be to open a public charter school to prove that urban students can achieve at extraordinarily high levels. Critics told them it could not be done and certainly not without the expertise of a veteran principal. Others cautioned against starting a middle school, advising that it is the hardest nut to crack. But a few visionary leaders offered hope and said they would support the idea.

Led by the two Yale law students, Dacia Toll, a former teacher and Rhodes scholar, and Stefan Pryor, a former New Haven City alderman and policy advisor to the mayor, a 32-member team worked for 18 months to plan the school. On the planning team were teachers, parents,

philanthropists, bankers, lawyers, government leaders, foundation and university representatives, and six additional Yale law students.

Charles Terrell, chief executive officer of New Haven Savings Bank, helped to galvanize the business community and worked to get the school financing. Carroll Stevens of Yale Law School and Rod Lane of Southern Connecticut State University provided needed support from connecting Amistad with potential donors to helping to recruit teachers and serving as resources developing the education program. Local leaders and philanthropists offered financial and strategic support, as did the New Haven County Bar Association and the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce. The approval process was challenging because, while this charter school application was ranked number one in the state’s charter approval process (i.e., it would have been the first school to receive a charter), at the time there was no funding for new charter schools. Applicants were forced to appeal to members of the Connecticut General Assembly to get the necessary funding. They did so successfully.

The doors of Amistad Academy opened in 1999 to serve New Haven middle school students in grades 5–8. The school started with 84 fifth- and sixth-graders and subsequently expanded to 270 students. The school is named after the schooner La Amistad, which became a

symbol in the abolition movement after 53 West African captives on the ship staged a rebellion in 1839. A replica of the ship is based in the New Haven harbor.

In its first five years, the school received a deluge of applications—eight for every available seat. “I didn’t like having to explain to parents that getting a good education was based on luck in the lottery,” says Toll, who served as Amistad’s first principal. In 2003, as it became clear that more seats were needed to meet the demand, Amistad’s school leaders formed a separate nonprofit, Achievement First (see the box on p. 51, Replicating Amistad’s Successes: The Role of Achievement First, A Charter Management Organization), which replicated the Amistad Academy model and established Elm City Preparatory School in New Haven, a K–8 school. The nonprofit later launched several additional schools in Brooklyn, N.Y. Toll subsequently gave up the principalship to become president and CEO of Achievement First. In what was reportedly a smooth transition, seasoned Amistad teacher Matthew Taylor stepped in to replace her as principal.

Amistad Academy’s mission is three-fold: academic excellence, public citizenship, and public school reform. The school seeks to educate students so they will graduate prepared for successfully tackling academic challenges in high school, college, and beyond. The school also works to foster responsibility among students so that they take care of themselves, their school, and their community according to REACH values (i.e., respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship, and hard work). Doug McCurry, the superintendent of Achievement First schools, explains that the mission is to “change the life options of kids so they can succeed in college and life. It’s not about raising [scores] from the 20th percentile to the 35th. That’s still poor. We want dramatic gains, in academics and in character.”

The school’s mission is embedded in many of its daily routines. A daily, student-run morning circle at which the whole school gathers is an opportunity to publicly recognize students for good work and positive citizenship. On a monthly basis, students complete a REACH rubric, rating themselves on the five REACH values. Upon teacher corroboration of their self-assessment, students can earn awards and privileges, such as invitation to a formal breakfast at the end of the school year. Within the school, staff take care to “sweat the small stuff,” with the intent of preventing small issues from escalating into larger problems. Likewise, teachers use timers to keep classes on task and ensure that no time is wasted. Administrators demonstrate their commitment to academic excellence by teaching classes, and parents are asked to affirm their own devotion to Amistad’s goals by signing a contract pledging support of their children and the school.

School Operations and Educational Program

“Rigorous” and “relentless” are two words that staff, parents, and community members frequently use to describe this school’s academic and behavioral environment. Expectations are clearly communicated, verbally and visually, to students. Within the clean and bright school, hallways are decorated with art, college pennants, inspirational phrases, and signed parent contracts. Bulletin boards draw attention to famous Latinos and African-Americans who can serve as role models to the 95 percent Latino and African-American student body. Amistad demonstrates its commitment to all of its students by providing free lunch to everyone, not just the 84 percent who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

A large “Commitment to Excellence” poster hangs on the wall of every classroom. The post-

Replicating Amistad's Successes: The Role of Achievement First, A Charter Management Organization

In Amistad's fourth year, the leaders and board began carefully planning a way to maintain excellence at Amistad while building a new school reform effort. In June 2003, Amistad's leaders created a separate 501(c)3 nonprofit, Achievement First, with the mission of bringing Amistad's model and best practices to scale by creating a network of high-performing public charter schools to effect dramatic student achievement gains in low-performing urban districts. Their goal was to create a replicable system that can generate positive educational opportunities and outcomes for thousands of urban students by sharing effective practices and growing a network of high-performing charter schools in New York and Connecticut.

As a charter management organization (CMO), Achievement First provides a range of organizational and institutional supports for its member schools. The support it offers network schools is extensive, including but not limited to, developing curriculum; creating a technology-based interim assessment system; providing monthly budget reports for each school; purchasing staff benefits and insurance; fund-raising; providing access to audit and legal services; recruiting teachers and school leaders, providing a two-year sequence of professional development opportunities for all teachers and leadership training for all prospective principals; conducting principal evaluations twice a year and an intensive school inspection once every two years; and coordinating special services, such as food service, maintenance and custodial service, and transportation. Achievement First also handles marketing to potential parents, students, and teachers, and manages the student lottery and enrollment process for its network schools.

As a network, Achievement First can leverage resources to provide high-quality systems for which individual schools might not have the resources on their own. By providing these services, Achievement First frees the principal to focus on instructional leadership and ensuring high-quality school programs. For example, Achievement First does all of the fund-raising, so that principals do not have to engage in such time-consuming activities. While the local school site pays the salary for each school site's director of operations, Achievement First manages this staff member, providing training and oversight. All teachers and administrators from Achievement First schools come together two days a year for focused seminars, professional development, and exchange of best practices with colleagues.

er begins with a preamble that states, "I have the power to create a great life for myself. I have high standards and always behave in a way that brings me closer to my goals of success in high school, college, and life. I follow the rules to keep my community safe and strong. To achieve my goals, I will follow the REACH values. ..." Beneath this opening, the five REACH values are listed with specific methods of achieving them. For example, under Respect, one of the instructions is "Treat Teachers Like PLATINUM: My teachers care about me and my family. I never talk back, roll my eyes, or suck my teeth. My teachers are here to help me be my best, so

I treat them with TOTAL RESPECT." The focus on helping these middle school students aspire to college appears twice within this pledge. For example, under Enthusiasm are the words "Bring an A+ Attitude: I'm excited to climb the mountain to college. I always bring a positive attitude. I never whine, pout, or act out when things don't go my way."

Just as the classroom poster is explicit about behavioral expectations, so, too, are Amistad staff honest with students about their achievement. They talk to students directly about their level of performance in order to inculcate a sense

of urgency regarding achievement. “We’re up front with them,” says dean of students William Johnson. “We tell them, ‘You are behind.’ We congratulate them when they do well, but not when they’re behind.” This attitude feeds into school policy. For example, if students get in trouble and are removed from class for breaking rules, they cannot avoid schoolwork. They must make up any missed work.

Amistad Academy prides itself on using data to inform teaching and learning. All Amistad students are selected by a blind lottery run by the New Haven Public Schools; as a result, there is no “creaming,” that is, taking only higher-performing students. On average, Amistad’s incoming fifth-graders test two years below grade level in reading and mathematics. Every six weeks, the school conducts interim assessments based on, but more rigorous than, the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), to evaluate student progress and identify areas in need of improvement. Using these data help Amistad staff teach for mastery because they can find out whether or not students understand underlying concepts and, if not, refine their teaching accordingly. Sue Harmon, Amistad’s academic dean, brags that all Amistad teachers are excellent but says that she assigns the “best of the excellent” to teach struggling students in small groups. This staffing decision differentiates Amistad from many public schools where the least experienced or prepared teachers frequently are assigned to the most challenging students. Amistad also has a group of teachers known as the “Whatever It Takes” team that provides intensive help for struggling readers. “The goal,” says Toll, “is to close the achievement gap with the wealthiest districts.” This takes “audacity and focus,” she adds. Amistad offers before- and after-school tutoring for struggling students, as well as Saturday classes and a three-week summer school.

From Monday to Thursday, Amistad students attend school from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., a school day that is an hour and a half longer than that of typical public schools. On Fridays, students start at 7:30 a.m. but are dismissed at 1 p.m., giving teachers time to plan together and engage in professional development. During the nine-and-a-half-hour school day, students spend three and a half hours on reading and writing; after school, all students have homework assignments that include independent reading. In all of their work, the emphasis is on conceptual learning. “We teach for mastery, not for coverage,” says Harmon.

Amistad uses an unconventional form of tracking to push students forward: staff divide students into four academic groups and differentiate teaching and support to ensure that members of each group get what they need to succeed. Unlike in traditional tracking where low performers get less attention and low expectations, Amistad teachers expect all students to work to their capacity and constantly push all students in all groups to do better. Some fifth-graders enter performing at a kindergarten or first-grade level. That group gets the best teachers, those described by Harmon as being “experts at moving kids forward.”

With the exception of the Reading Mastery program for the poorest readers, Amistad does not use packaged curricula and, instead, develops its own standards-based and rigorously taught curriculum. Director of Curriculum Development Kathleen Porter-Magee describes the Amistad curriculum as “state standards *plus*.” For the past two years, Amistad has focused on science and mathematics, and it is currently going through what one staff member calls “writing revolution.” Upon opening, the school’s writing curriculum centered on expository and persuasive writing; now it is broadening to include personal narratives, poetry, research pa-

pers, compare-and-contrast analyses, and literary analysis essays.

Members of the school management team, including the principal and academic dean, teach classes. Harmon says that as an instructional leader, she loves being in the classroom because it shows her what teachers need to do in order to be successful with Amistad students. One tool employed in every classroom is using a timer to keep students on task and push them to be productive. In a low-level reading class, for example, a teacher eyed a student who had been dragging his feet and said, “You’ve been picking through those books for 12 minutes.” She then selected a book and offered it to the student, telling him that he would “love it.” This teacher also demonstrated her ability to push and compliment lagging and ambitious students, alike. To a student who picked out the slimmest book available, she said, “You won’t read anything over 100 pages. That’s a wimpy way out of things. Challenge yourself. I’m not asking you to read a 700-page book. At least get to a 200-page book.” To another student who selected the 352-page biography of Medgar Evers, she offered accolades: “I’m very proud of you. That’s a tough book.”

Amistad teachers are attuned to habits and changes among individual students, but are also responsive to the class as a whole. In one mathematics class, a teacher asked the students to individually complete a timed mathematics exercise and then swap papers with a partner to check answers and explain the problem-solving techniques used. When she saw how lethargic students were in working together, she stopped the class, told everyone to stand up, and said, “You need a warm-up.” She then engaged them in a game in which she calls out types of angles (e.g., right, left, acute) that students have to form with their arms. Students who miss the angle sit down, and the teacher gives instruc-

tions faster and faster until there is one student left standing. At the end of the game, everyone was energized.

Family Involvement and External Partnerships

Parents, students, and school staff sign a contract that outlines their shared commitment to hard work and consistent support of one another. In addition, Amistad staff members meet with new families over the summer to ensure they understand the school’s expectations. The school also communicates regularly with parents throughout the year. Every Monday, students bring home a “scholar dollar paycheck.” Scholar dollars are points earned through good attendance, good work, and good behavior; they can be used for such things as pizza lunches and fun after-school activities one Friday a month. The paycheck provides detailed information about a student’s attendance, work, and behavior.

Every Wednesday, parents receive a more general school update with information about schedules and upcoming events. Parents are required to sign the monthly REACH rubrics that students and teachers complete, as well as to attend a progress report conference every trimester.

Parents appreciate the effort the school makes to involve them. One parent says, “The school is open and they welcome you anytime. They value parent input. Every time I’ve raised an issue, it’s been addressed.” Amistad gives parents various opportunities to be directly involved in school leadership, in such ways as participating on the Parent Leader Council or as the parent member of the board of directors. They also encourage parents to be involved with the classroom, in such ways as chaperoning field trips. One of the school’s newest parent-school activities is the Big Job Seminar at which the

entire school staff and parents gather three times a year to discuss parenting challenges and to offer one another advice and support. According to the parent satisfaction survey completed at the end of the 2005–06 school year, 97 percent of parents gave Amistad an A or A+. One parent commented, “This is a good institution. They stress the importance of education. They have high standards and push people toward those standards. ... It should be a model everywhere. Every child deserves what they have here at Amistad.”

Within the community, Amistad has maintained the close relationship its founders had to Yale University and the surrounding area. The volunteer tutor program, for example, draws over 30 volunteers from Yale, local churches, and businesses.

Governing for Accountability

The state of Connecticut authorizes Amistad’s charter, which is, in turn, overseen by a 19-member board of directors. The board includes representatives from the business, legal, philanthropic, and education worlds. Two teachers and a parent also have spots on the board, which meets about five times a year. Amistad’s board of directors works in partnership with Achievement First to provide support, oversight, and leadership to the school.

The Amistad management team consists of the principal, the academic dean, and the dean of students. Since 1999, the school has had only two principals, Toll and, now, Matthew Taylor. Teacher recruitment plays a large role in

Amistad’s success. There are two full-time staff dedicated to recruiting teachers for Achievement First’s New Haven schools. When hiring teachers, Amistad looks for those with a strong commitment to closing the achievement gap, interest in being in an urban school, comfort with data-driven decision-making, receptiveness to feedback, and dedication to working as part of a team. The hiring process includes an extensive written application, phone interviews, school visits, guest teaching, and a debriefing to gauge how well the candidate receives feedback. “We put them through the ringer to make sure we find the right people,” says recruiter Carla Seeger. Toll also notes that she hires “for attitude as opposed to experience. With the right attitude, we can teach them how to teach.”

Amistad utilizes ongoing professional development to advance its teachers’ skills. Frequent classroom observations, combined with twice yearly comprehensive evaluations, yield feedback for teachers, who, in exchange for working longer days, earn about 10 percent more than those in other public schools in the area. Teachers also are eligible for a \$1,500 attendance bonus if they are present every day and a prorated amount based on the number of missed days.

The state provides about \$8,000 of the \$11,000 Amistad spends per student. To fill the gap, Amistad uses a combination of categorical federal funding (e.g., Title I, special education), government grants, and philanthropic gifts. The Achievement First development office helps raise money, and the school has successfully petitioned the state to increase charter school allocations.

Student Achievement at Amistad Academy

- Based on Amistad Academy's successes, the Connecticut State Department of Education selected the school as one of the first four Connecticut Vanguard School Award winners, which gave the instructional leadership group a chance to mentor the staff of a nearby middle school.
- Amistad Academy was named Connecticut's 2006 Title I Distinguished School for showing the greatest academic performance gains of any school in the state.
- As shown in tables 2 and 3, Amistad Academy sixth-graders in the classes of 2004, 2005, and 2006 consistently tested ahead of students at the district level, but behind those at the state level, in reading and mathematics on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). Yet, when tested again in eighth grade, the 2004, 2005, and 2006 Amistad Academy cohorts exceeded the district and state in reading and mathematics.

Table 2. Percentage of Amistad Students Scoring Proficient or Above on CMT Reading

| | Class of 2004 in 6th Grade | Class of 2004 in 8th Grade | Class of 2005 in 6th Grade | Class of 2005 in 8th Grade | Class of 2006 in 6th Grade | Class of 2006 in 8th Grade |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Amistad Academy | 37 | 80 | 46 | 69 | 33 | 68 |
| New Haven Public Schools | 25 | 31 | 27 | 33 | 29 | 35 |
| State (Conn.) | 64 | 67 | 64 | 65 | 62 | 67 |

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education, Strategic School Profile 2005–06

Table 3. Percentage of Amistad Students Scoring Proficient or Above on CMT Mathematics

| | Class of 2004 in 6th Grade | Class of 2004 in 8th Grade | Class of 2005 in 6th Grade | Class of 2005 in 8th Grade | Class of 2006 in 6th Grade | Class of 2006 in 8th Grade |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Amistad Academy | 35 | 75 | 43 | 62 | 41 | 69 |
| New Haven Public Schools | 24 | 19 | 29 | 22 | 28 | 28 |
| State (Conn.) | 61 | 56 | 61 | 56 | 62 | 58 |

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education, Strategic School Profile 2005–06



Carl C. Icahn Charter School

Bronx, N.Y.

| School Profile: Selected Variables ^a | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Year First Chartered | 2001 |
| Grades Served | K-7 |
| Enrollment | 278 |
| Student Ethnicity ^b | 59% African-American 41% Hispanic |
| Special Education | 5% |
| Free or Reduced-price Lunch ^b | 89% |
| Annual Cost per Student | \$9,829 |

^a Unless otherwise indicated, these data are reported by the school and are for the school year 2006-07.

^b These data are drawn from the Carl C. Icahn Charter School school report card for 2005-06 posted on the New York State Education Department's Web site.

Mission and Founding

Known as a “turnaround” principal, Jeffrey Litt has been working in the same five-mile radius of the South Bronx for most of his 38 years in education. “I won’t take an easy assignment,” he says. “I always work with the population that most people run from.” Given the opportunity to build a charter school from scratch, Litt jumped at the chance and has created a new elementary school based on E.D. Hirsch’s Core Knowledge curriculum, which focuses on key concepts of western civilization in mathematics, language, science, history, music, art, and more. With the financial backing of billionaire Carl C. Icahn, the eponymous school received its charter in March 2001 and opened in September 2001 with grades K-2.

Constructed in three months out of modular portables on an empty lot, the Carl C. Icahn Charter School has outgrown its original space. As of 2006-07, the child care and K-1 classrooms were located across the street in the Icahn Homeless Shelter* while the school was completing building an \$11 million, five-story facility that will accommodate eight classrooms, a library, and multipurpose rooms. Once this building is finished, the school will be able to expand from a K-7 to a K-8 school.

* This shelter also is funded by Carl C. Icahn but as a separate entity from the school.

The school’s portable buildings are protected by a locked metal fence with curled barbed wire at the top. A television monitor in Litt’s office enables him to view the entire campus at any time. Understanding that, as he puts it, “A reputation is everything in the inner city,” Litt has worked tirelessly to ensure that the school has a good reputation and commands respect. Prior to opening the school, Litt walked floor to floor in neighboring high-rise housing projects to introduce himself, spread the word about Icahn Charter School, and encourage parents to send their children to the new school.

Litt sets high expectations for school and students alike. The school’s mission is to prepare its 278 students to be productive citizens through rigorous academics. As Icahn Charter School board member Seymour Fliegel, president of the Center for Educational Innovation, underscores, the school is dedicated to giving kids from the South Bronx the chance to succeed at high levels: “Carl C. Icahn has a big thing for poor kids,” Fliegel explains. “He cares about the leadership of the school.”

Based on Litt’s previous positive experience with the Core Knowledge program at another school, he selected it as the path to implementing the school’s mission. Visiting a model Core Knowledge program in Florida, Litt was told the curriculum would not work in the Bronx because “the kids are too poor.” Undaunted, Litt

listened and learned, ultimately choosing to use the curriculum, but to make some adaptations that would render it more accessible to his particular inner-city students. For example, Litt made sure to emphasize minority history and culture and connect those areas to mathematics and science. In addition, Litt decided to extend both the school day and the school year (September through July) to increase teachers' opportunity to teach necessary skills and instill a love of learning in students.

As the school looks forward to initiating an eighth grade, it intends to prepare students for the New York City high school admissions tests for selective public schools, as well as for applications to prestigious boarding schools, such as Connecticut's Choate Rosemary Hall. Students accepted to Choate may apply to become an Icahn Scholar, thus receiving full scholarship.

School Operations and Educational Program

Icahn Charter School is a safe oasis in a tough urban neighborhood. Litt describes the school as "a huggy, kissy school," adding that "students don't want to leave us at vacation." Parents comment that Litt respects their families, noting that Litt always signs his letters, "Thank you for your wonderful children."

During the school year, many students attend Icahn Charter School's Saturday Academy from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and almost half the students stay for extended care Monday through Friday until 6 p.m. The school population is 59 percent African-American and 41 percent Hispanic. Eighty-nine percent of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. It also has a 95 percent attendance rate. In the lower grades, students work at group desks in classrooms with colorful displays on the wall and engaging materials on the shelves. In the older grades, students sit

in individual desks, lined up in rows, and focus on workbooks or textbook assignments. Every classroom has three computers and a library of books for students to use.

Siblings of current students are automatically enrolled in the school, and a lottery assigns the remaining slots. In 2006, 652 students were on the waiting list. Older children may apply for openings in later grades. While many who enter in an upper grade must catch up to their peers, those who have worked hard have been successful. Litt points to a third-grader who entered Icahn Charter School unable to decode or read and ended the year passing the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) on grade level. "After the Iowa results in June, I called his mother to tell her his results," Litt says. "She was screaming and crying into the phone, 'Mr. Litt, I love you,' and I told her, 'No, love him. He worked hard.'"

The Core Knowledge program accounts for about 50 percent of the Icahn Charter School curriculum. It is used in all subjects, and teachers supplement it with the McGraw-Hill reading and mathematics program, an internal writing and literacy program, and manipulatives in science and mathematics. As one teacher points out, Core Knowledge is about "exposure, introducing students to phrases, art, music, geography, science, giving them a well-rounded education." The program offers teachers a clear outline of what to teach, as well as a sequenced grade-to-grade learning map that promotes consistency in instruction.

Teachers send home monthly syllabi that detail the topics or themes to be taught in the month, a list of nightly homework assignments with due dates, and a schedule of quizzes and tests. One parent refers to the school's no-nonsense approach. The school's teachers have developed detailed rubrics to assess literacy and writing at every grade level. Whether talking about a writer's notebook, looking through a writer's

poetry portfolio, or grading bimonthly assignments, such as literature responses, research reports, and narrative memoirs, teachers, students, and parents are all in sync about how work is assessed. Thus, it's easy for parents to understand how their children are progressing.

To be promoted to the next grade, students must demonstrate 90 percent attendance, satisfactory growth, a score of average or better on the ITBS, or a level 3 or 4 (out of four) on the New York State English language arts (ELA) and mathematics exams, and be judged by teachers as able to succeed at the next level. A full-time director of assessment monitors academic progress using pre- and post-ITBS results as a baseline. Because the New York state exams begin in third grade, the school has K–2 students take the McGraw-Hill Fox-in-a-Box literacy assessment and uses the Waterford Early Reading Program to monitor these younger students' reading progress.

The assessment director also identifies students who need skill development in the same area and places them in four- to five-member groups for 40 minutes of remediation work five times a week with the targeted-assistance teacher. These students also may receive help from a paraprofessional during school, after-school tutoring, homework assistance, and weekend tutoring. When all is said and done, the school will retain students who are not considered ready for the next grade. As Litt says, "We don't hesitate to hold them if we need more time." For the 5 percent of students who qualify for special education services, there is a part-time special education teacher. Students who are referred to speech therapy can receive help from an after-school speech teacher.

Icahn Charter School also offers after-school activities, including a step team, cheerleading, school newspaper, Girl and Boy Scouts programs, and mathematics and ELA targeted-

assistance tutoring. Students can play on basketball, flag football, volleyball, and softball teams. Through the Charter School Athletic Association of New York, on Mondays, its students can play flag football in the fall and run track in the spring at Icahn Stadium on Randall's Island.

External Partnerships

Parents or guardians are instrumental to their children's success in school, and school staff are in constant contact with them. If a student is absent, parents know to expect a phone call checking up on their child's well-being and asking why the child missed school. The school sends narrative progress reports to and holds conferences with parents six times a year, but teachers stay in touch more frequently by phone. Because 87 percent of the students are brought to school by their parents, teachers see and speak with parents in person. At a schoolwide open house at the beginning of every year, Litt makes clear that he wants to meet and talk with parents. He starts by saying, "Don't ever call the office to make an appointment with me." After waiting to see the concerned expressions pop up on parents' face, he cracks a big smile and continues, "Come in, make yourself a cup of coffee. ... Wait [and] I will make myself available as soon as possible to meet with you. I am here every day until 7 p.m."

Parents also contribute their time to the school. They organize class parties, chaperone field trips, and sign the reading logs, homework, and tests sent home. The school PTA meetings are standing room only and have been known to last five hours. When seventh-grade teachers wanted each of their students to have a calculator at home, all of the families found money to purchase them. "You give parents a school that takes care of their kids, and you will get all the

parental support you need,” comments board member Fliegel. Icahn Charter School also has created opportunities for parents. At the school’s math fair, students present research on professions to their parents, and then the parents learn how to navigate Excel spreadsheets to look at information students compiled and engage in learning with their children.

Within the community, the school also partners with several organizations. Staff can refer students to the Bronx Children’s Psychiatric Center for counseling. Grants from the Charles Hayden Foundation support both operating expenses and camp opportunities for students. The school also arranges summer camp experiences through the *New York Times*’ Fresh Air Fund, and it connects students to twice-yearly arts programs at Columbia University.

Community partnerships also support professional development for teachers. Icahn Charter School contracts with the City University of New York’s Creative Arts Team to conduct storytelling and questioning skills workshops with teachers. Lehman College provides five scholarships for graduate school and, together with the New York City Mathematics Project, the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, CUNY, provides two mathematics consultants.

Governing for Accountability

Authorized by the Charter Schools Institute, the school’s charter was renewed for five years in 2005. A 10-member charter school board led by chairperson Carl C. Icahn oversees the school, which is supported by collaboration between the Foundation for a Greater Opportunity (which Icahn created in 1997) and the Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association. Representatives from area foundations and institutions, as well as from the PTA and the

school management team, have positions on the board. In contrast to the school principal who concentrates on curriculum and school operations, the board focuses on accountability, advocacy, and long-term planning.

The principal, the assistant principal of operations, the director of assessment, and the staff developer meet daily as the school’s management team. There is also an administrative team, which consists of the principal, the assistant principal of operations, the director of assessment, the staff developer, the math coach, and the ELA coach. The teaching staff is made up of two teachers at every grade level, three targeted-assistance teachers, two cluster teachers for history and geography, three paraprofessionals, and one school aide.

Teachers have a designated common planning period every day, during which they can plan together, develop instructional units, compose the monthly syllabi, and meet with support staff to coordinate student assistance. The staff developer and curriculum specialists provide in-depth support to teachers who submit their weekly lesson plans every Monday. The team of coaches and the staff developer maintain a log of consultations to keep track of areas needing improvement. There are also ongoing professional development workshops for teachers on such topics as differentiated mathematics classrooms, research and grade-level rubrics, and teaching grammar. Together, the teachers and staff developers have created high-frequency word lists as well as rubrics for ELA standards, expository writing, poetry and narrative, research reports, literature responses, and grade-level writing mechanics.

The school operates on a budget of \$3,006,721, of which \$198,884 comes from federal categorical sources, \$2,766,764 comes from the state, \$32,173 comes from grants, and \$8,900 comes from donations. The school expects to

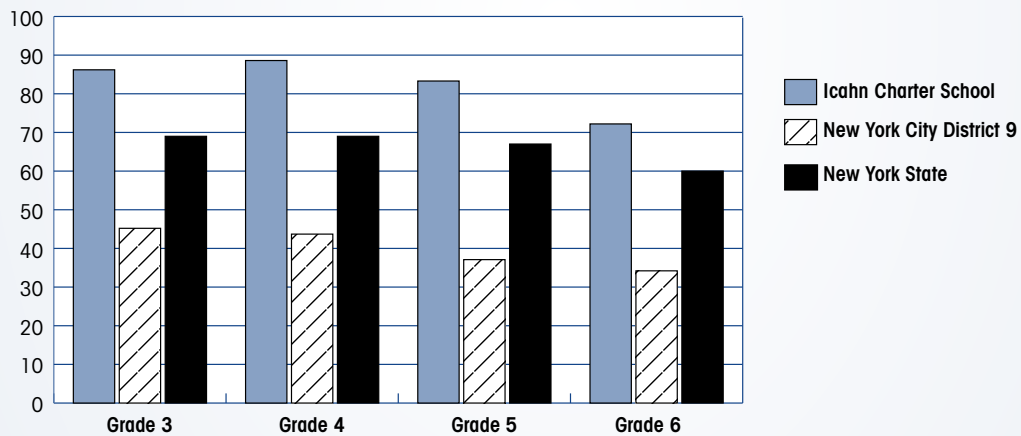
spend \$10,815 per student during the 2006–07 school year. Teachers are paid a salary on par with the public school district, but are not eligible for the district’s pension, its housing allowance for math and science teachers, or

the larger salaries given to experienced teachers. To help compensate for this discrepancy, the school offers teachers a 401(k), life insurance, and bonuses based on schoolwide student performances.

Student Achievement at Carl C. Icahn Charter School

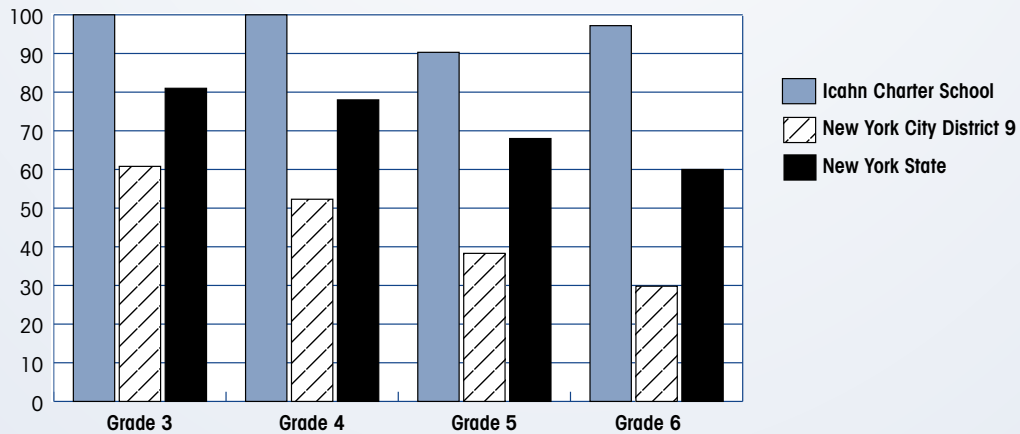
- The 2005–06 English language arts results on the New York State Testing Program (NYSTP) show that Icahn Charter School students outperformed those at all other New York charter schools in grades 2–5 and were second to students at only one other charter school in grade 6 for mathematics.
- As shown in figures 14 and 15, Icahn Charter School students scored at least 40 percentage points higher on the 2006 NYSTP than students in other district public schools.
- In May 2006, the New York Board of Regents and the New York State Department of Education recognized the Carl C. Icahn Charter School as one of the state’s 795 “high performing gap closing” schools out of 1,658 public schools and 288 school districts.

Figure 14. Percentage of Carl C. Icahn Students Scoring Proficient and Above on 2006 NYSTP English Language Arts



Source: New York State Education Department, School Report Card 2005–06

Figure 15. Percentage of Carl C. Icahn Students Scoring Proficient and Above on 2006 NYSTP Mathematics



Source: New York State Education Department, School Report Card 2005–06

Cesar Chavez Academy

Pueblo, Colo.

| School Profile: Selected Variables ^a | |
|---|--|
| Year First Chartered | 2001 |
| Grades Served | K-8 |
| Enrollment | 1,100 |
| Student Ethnicity ^b | 75% Hispanic 23% White 1% African-American 1% Native American |
| Special Education | 12% |
| Free or Reduced-price Lunch ^c | 62% |
| Annual Cost per Student | \$8,696 |

^a Unless otherwise indicated, these data are reported by the school and are for the school year 2006–07.

^b These data are reported online for 2005–06 at <http://www.schoolmatters.com>.

^c These data are drawn from the Cesar Chavez Academy report card for 2005–06 posted on the Colorado Department of Education Web site.

Mission and Founding

Anyone entering Cesar Chavez Academy, a modern adobe-style refurbishment of a former public elementary school, first sees a large black *aguila*, the square-winged eagle symbol of La Causa, César Chávez’s populist, nonviolent crusade for Mexican immigrant dignity, living wages, decent working conditions, and pride. This symbol of social justice speaks as loudly today for underserved Latino students in Pueblo, Colo., a community characterized by its poverty, as it did when Chavez first united poor farmworkers in the 1960s. With Pueblo’s earlier steel mills replaced today by a low-wage service economy and local families facing rising gang crime and narrowing job prospects, husband-and-wife team Lawrence and Annette Hernandez, along with community activists, founded Cesar Chavez Academy (CCA) in 2000 as a new kind of school, one that could live up to the eagle’s promise.

CCA’s mission, displayed in hallway murals, banners, bulletin boards, and, even, the school’s bus, is to prepare Pueblo’s children for “success as young scholars, citizens of the world, and community leaders.” This mission is grounded in the conviction that all children are capable of learning at high levels if they are taught by skilled

educators, challenged by engaging curriculum, afforded adequate time to master content, and held to ambitious standards. The mission binds school staff, students, and parents together as *familia*. Says one board member, “If you don’t buy into the mission that poor students can and will excel, you won’t want to work as hard as you have to at Cesar Chavez—and we won’t let you stay long.” “Here,” he adds, “we’re family; we’re all here for the kids.”

Originally conceived as serving kindergarten through third grade, CCA soon grew into a pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade program. The school is committed to achieving academic excellence through rigorous studies, team teaching in small classes, a longer school day and year, strong parent commitment, and “healthy intrusiveness”—this last described as the intensive involvement of faculty and staff in the lives of their students. This includes an extensive tutoring program. The school’s motto is “No excuses, no surprises.” Every student knows their academic standing, in every course and every assignment, and knows there are resources available to help them excel.

CCA cofounder and principal Lawrence Hernandez grew up in Pueblo and left his

hometown to pursue advanced studies. After earning a Ph.D. in education from Stanford University and serving on the faculty at Harvard University, he decided to “go home to make a difference.” The core group of founders were inspired by Chavez’ phrase, “*Si, se puede*” (Yes, we can), and named their enterprise after the Mexican-American leader.

School Operations and Educational Program

Cesar Chavez Academy offers its students an award-winning, ambitious academic program, with a curriculum aligned to meet or exceed Colorado’s high academic content standards. The program also emphasizes the history, culture, and native language of Latinos. “We’re very intentional about our culture,” explains principal Hernandez. “It emphasizes hard work, respect, personal responsibility, resourcefulness, and loyalty to the golden rule [i.e., treat others as you would like to be treated].” Of the school’s rigorous curriculum, he says, “It holds students to a higher bar with high standards, and they must meet it over and over.” Each student must complete every assignment. Work that receives a grade below 80 percent must be redone with additional instruction, time, space, materials, or other resources needed to ensure mastery. “All students succeed because we don’t allow them to fail,” Hernandez says. “We set kids up for success.”

Tutoring is used schoolwide to help teachers individualize instruction, modify pacing, check for understanding, reteach content, monitor student work, and build teacher-student relationships. “Kids will work for someone they love,” reflects a veteran teacher who believes that when instruction is personalized and teacher-student connections are made, struggling students become more successful learners. CCA’s one-

on-one tutoring program is designed to give students whatever they need to master core subjects, improve their writing, hone study skills, and manage emotions that can get in the way of learning (e.g., anxiety, frustration). Students meet with teachers for tutoring before school, during recess, lunch, and teacher preparation periods, after school, during weekends, and on holidays. Students have teachers’ personal phone numbers so they can call after hours for help with assignments. Students receive enrichment, accelerated learning opportunities, field experiences, counseling, and additional time to relearn lessons. They are responsible for taking comprehensive oral and written exams, managing regular projects, demonstrating key skills, and creating portfolios of their work—all of which is graded using rubrics. They must redo work that receives a grade of 80 percent or less, and all written work must undergo an extensive revision process that results in a final mistake-free product.

Student success is not left to chance. In addition to academic support, CCA provides its students with clear rules for behavior and conduct. These rules are modeled throughout the school and codified in a student-parent-teacher compact. Students are required to wear uniforms, and dress code violations result in disciplinary action, starting with reflective writing assignments about school expectations. Behavioral infractions are documented and then followed by a “see three before me” intervention by which students receive counseling, guidance, and redirection from three staff members before, if necessary, the principal gets involved. Good behavior is rewarded and bad behavior is addressed. The most common infractions are incomplete homework, tardiness, and absences. One board member speaks of a student who was regularly tardy or absent and falling behind in her studies. A home visit revealed that both parents were mentally disabled and no longer

had a car. They rode bicycles instead and were unable to transport her across town to school. Board members and teachers came together to make sure the student had a ride to school every day. That same student subsequently won that year's district spelling bee.

Except for the prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, the school is structured around team teaching, and students rotate to different classes. In the first and second grades, students have three teachers, one for reading and social studies, one for mathematics and science, and one for writing. In third through fifth grades, students rotate to 11 different teachers, plus a tutor, for writing, reading, mathematics, science, social studies, Spanish, and five different electives. Middle school students rotate similarly but have one less elective teacher. For teachers, mastering deep content and pedagogical expertise is essential to their professional success at CCA, and they rely upon one another for help with specialized knowledge and skills.

A typical day for the school's prekindergarten through eighth-grade classes begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 4:05 p.m., with full-day kindergarten ending at 3:50 p.m. The half-day kindergarten programs runs from 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and from 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Many students arrive about an hour before school to eat a free breakfast and nearly all students stay until 5:30 p.m. for extracurricular activities or tutoring. Middle school students in the award-winning mariachi band program have a slightly varied schedule to accommodate their daily, two-hour practice sessions.

As a way to battle the influence of gang activity in the community and to help foster student friendships, school staff encourage membership in authorized—and supervised—student clubs and organizations. All students must participate in after-school enrichment activities, and all teachers

must teach or supervise at least one extracurricular activity. The school boasts champion sports teams; the mariachi band has placed second in international competitions; there are choir, theater, and other clubs, such as public speaking, LEGO challenge, and chess. Student leadership is cultivated through the student council, academic competitions, honor-society activities, and charity work. Middle school students at CCA mentor students in the lower grades. Though the student population is primarily low-income, they collect food for less fortunate farmworkers in the rural part of their county.

School leaders pay attention to individual students' academic needs and work hard to cultivate a safe environment where students feel they belong. Staff members are also mindful of more quantitative measures of success. "We see ourselves as a totally data-driven school," explains the principal, pointing to ways that teachers use assessment score data to customize curriculum and instruction to meet students' learning needs. "Data," he explains, "tell us where we are" with each student, class, and grade level and help teachers choose the appropriate interventions. At the center of CCA's assessment approach is an individual achievement plan for each student, which is based on an intensive quarterly item analysis of a repeat-measures exam aligned to the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). By analyzing student performance on the same test items over time, teachers can gauge student mastery of the standards. "We all do item analysis," says a new teacher. "I fought it tooth and nail, but I lost—and I'm glad because [doing] it shows a clear picture of what I need to teach or reteach." Score data are disaggregated using a number of criteria: student name, grade, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, English learner designation, date entering Cesar Chavez Academy, and special education status. Numbers are presented in graphs and charts for staff to review and then follow up on as appropriate.

One teacher comments that the principal has a computer-like brain, because if someone points to a particular student, he can immediately describe the assessment data for that child.

Family Involvement and External Partnerships

CCA believes student success is enhanced when parents participate in the life of the school and in students' learning process. Parents, explains the principal, "support us by making sure kids have a place and time to do homework, and [by] coming to conferences." Parents provide transportation for other needy students, drive students to sports events, staff the concession stand at events, work in the library, donate uniforms to the clothes closet, and staff clubs and other activities like Girl Scouts.

School staff and parents agree that two-way communication is strong and consistent, that parent input is constant and valued. Regular newsletters are sent home in Spanish and English, and parents are contacted early in the day if a student is tardy or absent or is missing homework. If such problems persist, the school's prevention specialist conducts unscheduled home visits to investigate the problem and find ways to support the student. New this school year at CCA is PowerSchool, an online tracking system that allows parents and students to electronically monitor assignments and grades from home.

"We constantly collect data from parents," explains Hernandez. "All parents have opportunities to voice issues." Parents are invited to complete an anonymous online survey at least four times a year, timed with quarterly conferences. Twice a year, a school climate survey is sent home, asking parents how welcome they feel at the school and what staff can do to better serve

them. Hernandez has an open-door policy and often walks around the parking lot during drop-off and pick up to speak with families. Parents are invited to join the board of directors and to attend monthly meetings.

From the outset, CCA offered a prekindergarten program, charging families \$350 per month. Since full-day kindergarten is not funded in Colorado, CCA provides scholarships, sliding scale fees, and fund-raisers to retain this option for families and to cover the monthly cost. According to the principal, Cesar Chavez Academy has a tradition of not relying upon other organizations to provide services. Except for the local library, few community organizations give services to CCA. Versatile school staff members meet most needs themselves. However, the board and the principal do work with the Pueblo Chamber of Commerce and the Latino Chamber of Commerce "to serve our business interests and help us raise money" and to support the economic health of Pueblo, as a board member explains. The principal also cooperates with the local Hyde Park Neighborhood Association, which is developing new higher-end housing in the neighborhood adjacent to the school. CCA's success has stimulated local real estate development, with developers aligning their plans with school capacity projections. Additionally, this neighborhood association was recently awarded grant funding to develop after-school programs for neighborhood children and youths and is working with the school as it moves forward.

Governing for Accountability

A nine-person board made up of business leaders, parents, and community activists governs CCA. The board actively assists and guides the administration, faculty, students, and families and does not provide a rubber stamp for all school proposals and plans. The board's goal,

like that of school leaders, is to make CCA “the epitome of great instruction, a source of pride for all of us.”

A site-based leadership team was initiated this year, the direct result of putting kids’ learning needs first and monitoring efforts to close the achievement gap. The leadership team, including the principal, director of operations, chief financial officer, director of assessment, teacher coaches, and family support team members, oversees the quality of teaching and learning and its improvement. The new structure created three academy directors, each a lead teacher without classroom duties, to direct the instructional programs for prekindergarten through second grades, third through fifth grades, and middle school (sixth through eighth grades). Each academy director is responsible for producing a quarterly student achievement plan, a snapshot of how students are doing and plans to improve learning, with current disaggregated student- and grade-level data to identify gains and target areas for interventions.

Teacher talent is key to the school’s successes, and one way the school ensures high-quality instructors is to grow its own. It is accredited by the state of Colorado to train and license teachers.²² “We give teachers a ton of support,” reports Hernandez. Teachers agree, describing professional development as being “everywhere, everyday” and “whenever we want it.” It starts during the interview process, explains the principal. “We try to hire only people who will be stars,” believing that novices “learn to become great teachers here.” While using outside experts as needed, “we try to build in-house capacity and expertise to do our own professional development,” which includes curriculum trainings, topical workshops, ongoing

feedback, evaluations of student work, analyzing student-level performance data, joint lesson planning, regular observations, and coaching on such techniques as differentiated instruction, which means tailoring instruction to students’ individual needs, learning style, interests, and abilities. All new teachers receive mentoring from a teacher with at least two years of experience at CCA. Induction support is highly valued. The mentor serves as a guide, advocate, confidante, subject expert, critical friend, champion, and reflective partner. One first-year teacher says, “There’s always someone to go to for everything.”

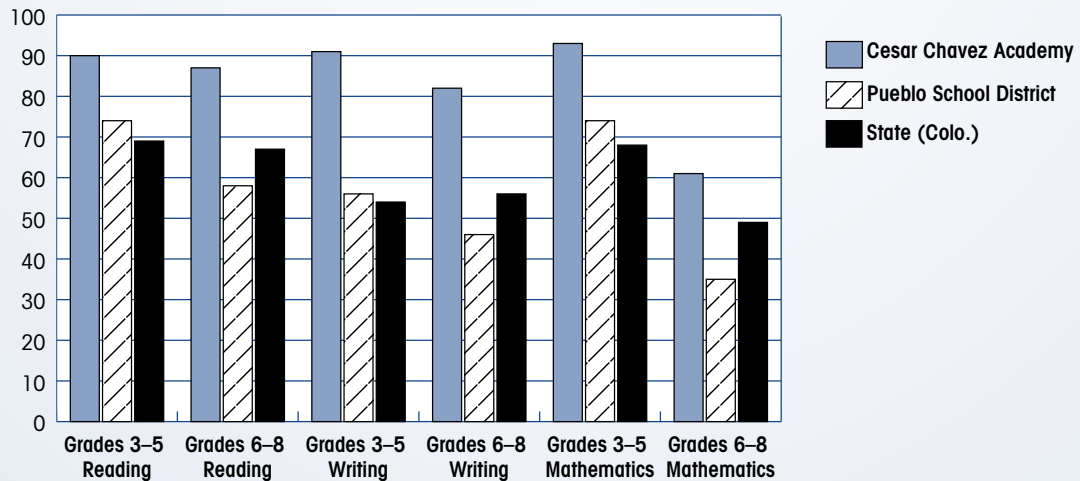
The school had its charter renewed in 2005 and will be up for reauthorization again in 2010. Renewal was part of a \$2.1 million award settlement against the local district, which did not adequately address CCA’s needs in an approved local bond. Currently, the school is embroiled in another lawsuit with the district over what school leaders believe to be anti-charter and anti-choice bias in the district’s treatment of the school. Despite these challenges, the board and principal are clear that the school’s accomplishments result from its charter status, giving it the flexibility to hire top teacher talent, fire teachers that do not meet the stringent standards, choose effective curricula, and adjust its budget to extend the school day, hire tutors, and add facilities as needed. “Without the charter we couldn’t do what we are doing—it would be squashed,” reflects principal Hernandez.

The school has a waiting list of 3,000 students. Spaces are offered by lottery and some families apply years before their children are school age, in hopes that they may be at the top of the waiting list in time. “Love and high test scores make us an easy sell,” explains an academy director.

Student Achievement at Cesar Chavez Academy (CCA)

- Data from the statewide assessment program, Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), show that CCA students consistently outperform students at neighboring schools serving similar populations and, also, at schools serving students from higher-income families.
- In 2005, the Colorado Children’s Campaign conducted a study of the state’s achievement gap, tracking CSAP test scores over a decade. The study found that while, for the most part, academic gains for low-income students did not keep pace with those of their more affluent peers at other schools, some exceptional schools beat the odds. One of those schools was CCA, which ranked fourth in the state for improved elementary schools serving low-income students and first in the state for improved middle schools.²³
- As shown in figure 16, CCA students in grades 3–8 consistently outperformed students at the district and state levels on the 2005–06 CSAP in reading, writing, and mathematics by an average of 25 percentage points. In a typical example, CCA proficiency scores in fourth-grade mathematics averaged 94 percent, as compared to an average of 69 percent statewide. CCA sixth-graders scored an average of 87 percent proficient on state reading tests, compared to an average of 69 percent for sixth-graders statewide. On mathematics tests, CCA sixth-graders scored an average of 71 percent proficient, compared to an average of 57 percent for sixth-graders statewide.

Figure 16. Percentage of CCA Students Scoring Proficient and Above on 2005–06 CSAP Reading, Writing, and Mathematics



Source: Colorado Department of Education, 2005–06 School Accountability Report Cards. Data are reported separately for grades 3–5 and 6–8.

The Intergenerational School

Cleveland

| School Profile: Selected Variables ^a | |
|---|--|
| Year First Chartered | 2000 |
| Grades Served | K-7 |
| Enrollment | 114 |
| Student Ethnicity | 86% African-American 4% White 1% Asian 9% Multiracial |
| Special Education | 8% |
| Free or Reduced-price Lunch ^b | 59% |
| Annual Cost per Student ^c | \$8,818 |

^a Unless otherwise indicated, these data are reported by the school and are for the school year 2006–07.

^b These data are drawn from the Intergenerational School school report card for 2005–06 posted on Ohio Department of Education Web site.

^c Includes aftercare, summer camp, summer school.

Mission and Founding

On the second floor of a building that houses services aimed at successful aging, the Intergenerational School (TIS) is bringing new meaning to lifelong learning. Purposefully located in Cleveland's Fairhill Center for the Aging, a community resource center which houses physician's offices, services for seniors, and a Meals on Wheels Association of America program, the school matches its students with local seniors, engaging these elders as partners in the learning process.

The idea for the school was born during conversations between the husband-and-wife team of Catherine Whitehouse, an educator and child development psychologist specializing in reading and learning disabilities, and Peter Whitehouse, a geriatric neurologist and cognitive neuroscientist. Ohio's 1998 decision to allow charter schools provided the Whitehouses with the opportunity to put their ideas into practice. The couple spent a year working with Stephanie FallCreek, executive director of Fairhill Center, to devise a plan for a developmentally based school for low-income inner-city students. "Healthy aging is a life-span process that starts when you are born," says Catherine Whitehouse, who now serves as the principal of TIS. The school's philosophy, she adds, is grounded

in the work of developmental theorists, such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Vygotsky, and Dewey.

In 2000, TIS opened with 30 students, a staff of two teachers, and a commitment to placing students in classrooms by their developmental stage rather than chronological age. That first year revealed how much these students had missed in their early development. "We really were not adequately prepared for how unprepared the children would be," Whitehouse recalls. "[Students] came in and didn't recognize their name, didn't know a single letter, and didn't know how to hold a pair of scissors to cut paper. They didn't know how to ask for something. I think it is because they have not had early educational experiences, such as preschool."

Since then, TIS has added one developmental stage each year, which is similar to adding a grade level, except that the school organizes students by developmental stage rather than grade level. TIS currently has 114 students enrolled across six developmental stages that correspond to the sequencing of learning from kindergarten through seventh grade. Each grouping includes children from two to three years apart in age. The school expects to add an additional developmental stage in the next two years, once it has the funding base to expand its operations.

School Operations and Educational Program

The school's structure follows these stages of developmental learning: emerging (grade K-1), beginning (grades 1-2), developing (grade 3), refining (grade 4), applying (grades 5-6), and leadership (grade 7). The school places students into each of the flexible, multiage groupings based on their developmental needs. Within a given classroom, older and younger students work both cooperatively and independently and progress through the stages at their own pace. "I try to instill in the age group that I work with that they can be thinkers and learners," one teacher explains.

The school curriculum, designed collaboratively by the principal and teachers, is aligned to state benchmarks and Ohio content standards. While it deviates from the grade-level structure employed by the state, TIS created an educational program that measures student progress and identifies areas for further instruction so students are academically prepared for high school by the completion of the leadership stage. Individual learning experiences are a hallmark of TIS. According to the annual report, an "individually tailored education address[es] each child's unique needs and capabilities." No class has more than 16 students per teacher, and all students develop one-on-one relationships with adult reading and math mentors, as well as with the assisted living and nursing home residents they visit regularly. Some stages are designed to take more than one school year to complete, and the range of ages among students in every class ensures that students do not stand out, whether they advance quickly or more slowly through a stage.

In this model, teachers use multisensory, differentiated instruction to build on students' strengths and meet their developmental learning needs. Students progress from one stage to

the next when they have mastered 90 percent of the math, reading, and writing objectives at a 90 percent level and demonstrate proficiency on state assessments. Students can move up to the next developmental stage at any time during the school year if they are ready, and TIS trimester report cards are organized to assess student mastery of skills, values, and standards within a given developmental stage.

Literacy is a major focus within the school. Students engage in 30 minutes of sustained silent reading (SSR) daily in class and are required to complete another 30 minutes of reading at home every night. In addition to SSR, most classes have an additional half hour of sustained silent writing once the students are able to do this independently. The principal trains senior volunteers from the community to serve as mentors and to work with students on reading and math. For students who are struggling, there are several intervention strategies available, including after-school tutoring by a teacher and support from the Title I instructor during the school day. TIS also contracts with special education teachers to assess and create individual education plans for students and with a part-time speech and language pathologist as necessary.

The Montessori-like classrooms are filled with colorful displays of student projects, vocabulary words, and signs enumerating community values. One classroom, for example, has cloud-shaped cutouts reading, "We are: thoughtful, cooperative, truthful, caring, kind, self-controlled, happy, loving, sharers, friends, respectful, listeners, playful, workers." In another classroom, a student selects a "sharing song" for the group to sing; a teacher plays the song on a tape recorder and the class sings along, verbally reinforcing the value of sharing and positive behavior. One board member remarks, "It is unusual to find this type of a school for inner-city kids," and the annual report describes TIS as an oasis

of vibrant learning, uncommon in its poor east-side Cleveland neighborhood.

“It is our belief that learning cannot take place in chaos,” says principal Whitehouse. “School should be a calm, peaceful, respectful, and exciting place to learn. ‘High expectations’ does not mean regimentation, but it does mean that what every student is expected to do and to learn is made very clear.” The school dress code of dark pants, jumper, or skirt and a plain, colored shirt also helps create a calm climate. “Students are accountable for their choices both behaviorally and academically and learn to make good choices by experiencing the natural consequences, both the good and bad,” Whitehouse says. Four schoolwide rules set high expectations for behavior: (1) Be respectful (of yourself, others, and school materials such as books); (2) Be where you are supposed to be at all times; (3) Keep your hands, feet, and objects to yourself; and (4) Remember that one person speaks at a time. Many teachers use classroom incentive programs, quotations from famous individuals, and music, such as the sharing song, to help students develop positive on-task behavior norms.

The students—86 percent African-American and 9 percent multiracial—attend school from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. An after-care program that ends at 6 p.m. is available to help working families. Even though the school lacks the resources to provide transportation, it maintains a 96 percent attendance rate and a 90 percent average retention rate from year to year. Beginning in January, there is a six-week open enrollment period in which any student in the state of Ohio may enroll in TIS. Returning students are guaranteed a space, and preference is given to siblings and residents of Cleveland. If the school receives more applicants than there are spaces available, TIS uses a lottery to select new students.

TIS created its own internal authentic assessments to evaluate student progress throughout the school year. In conjunction with the Ohio state tests, which include a beginning-of-year diagnostic screening and achievement test, the school can determine if students are making adequate progress and can intervene or make referrals as necessary. The school’s assessment allows the staff to closely monitor academic progress in between state benchmarks.

External Partnerships

TIS works closely with parents, families, and the community to support students. By providing flexible meeting times for parent-teacher conferences, the school has consistently enjoyed a 100 percent participation rate. The school reaches out to parents in other ways: The school newsletter, *TIS Community News*, which provides families with information regularly; notices sent home by teachers in homework folders; and school events, such as family math night, when teachers model working with children on math assignments. TIS also runs a six-week summer school for students who need additional academic help and assists families in applying for other summer programs and scholarships. The school would like to continue to increase its outreach to parents. “The best intergenerational programs have kid-only time, adult-only time, and time together,” Whitehouse says. “What we don’t really have well developed is the adult-only part, and that’s where that would include parent education. I would love to have a GED program available here for parents who have not completed a high school degree.”

In interviews for this guide, parents raved about the individual attention their children receive at TIS and point to the principal’s approachability as a key factor in making the school atmosphere warm and welcoming. One parent explained that

for her child, a special education student, “the piece of paper that is the [individualized education plan] has turned into something real in that classroom.” Another parent commented that her daughter used to hate to go to school prior to coming to TIS. “We had to fight about it every day,” she recalls. “There was no one-on-one attention at that school.” TIS has transformed her daughter’s relationship to school, she continues, “Now, she can’t get enough of this school. I love the atmosphere in the classrooms, the communication, and the high academic standards.” A third parent chimed in, saying, “TIS has been the answer for us. The process of education is incredible here because every child is treated as an individual.”

Community partnerships are critical to TIS fulfilling its intergenerational mission. Teachers work with nursing home facility coordinators to plan meaningful exchanges between students and residents during monthly (and, for older students, weekly) visits. The school and the partner facilities have found that the visits benefit both the children, who often internalize a sense of worth and belonging, and the seniors, who more frequently engage mentally and emotionally with children than with staff.

The location of TIS within Fairhill Center helps sustain local collaborations. Within Fairhill, the Senior Adult Resource Center recruits volunteer tutors and mentors from its population. The center facilitates an after-school museum explorer program, in which seniors and students together visit the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and a Cleveland Orchestra music program, in which seniors and students attend performances and learn about instruments. Volunteers from the National Council of Jewish Women come to the school monthly to meet with the parents of younger students, loaning books and discussing ways to read to their children.

Other external partnerships have included Groundworks, a contemporary dance company that worked with older TIS students and seniors to create a dance piece based on science concepts, and Case Western Reserve University, whose nursing students observe classes, plan nutrition lessons, and staff a family health fair during parent-teacher conferences.

Governing for Accountability

Sponsored by the Lucas County Education Service Center, TIS is a nonprofit organization operating under a charter from the state of Ohio. It has been rated excellent for three consecutive years by the Ohio Department of Education, the only charter school in the state to achieve this distinction. TIS recently was recognized by the national Schools That Can network as a high-performing urban school.

A seven-member board of directors oversees TIS’s executive director and chief educator. Executive Director Brooke King manages budgets and finance, compliance, community relations, marketing, fund-raising, facilities, and development and coordination of volunteer programs, as well as hiring and supervising nonteaching staff. Principal Whitehouse is the school’s chief educator. She hires and supervises teaching staff, classroom aides, and special education staff, and oversees curriculum, assessment, student learning and behavior, special education compliance, and volunteer training. The board meets monthly to review school governance, finances, and policy, and it strategizes about future growth and fund-raising capacity. In addition to the board, there is a national advisory council comprising experts in medicine, geriatrics, and education with whom TIS consults.

The nine full-time teaching staff are fully certified and rated as highly qualified according

to *No Child Left Behind* guidelines. There is a one-hour staff meeting every other Monday and regular professional development days for working on curriculum development and projects, such as redesigning the school report card. In addition to scheduled training time, teachers highlight their extensive informal collaboration. New teachers are paired with veteran teachers who serve as mentors, and the principal observes and coaches teachers frequently. “It’s my job to help the teacher figure out how to make each child succeed,” Whitehouse says. “When a teacher is having difficulty figuring out what to do for a child, we will sit down and brainstorm together.” A new teacher’s experience at TIS illustrates the principal’s commitment to helping her staff blossom. “The best thing about this school is Cathy Whitehouse,” the teacher says. “My first year of teaching, she

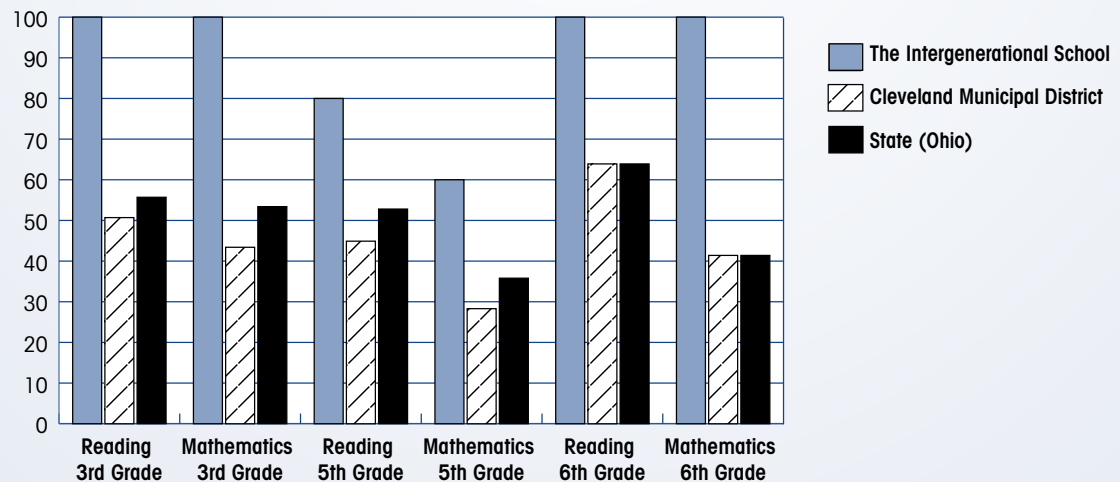
was there every single step of the way. She held my hand through the entire process.”

Funding is TIS’s biggest challenge. On average, teachers at TIS earn \$10,000 less than other teachers in the Cleveland public school district. Where most school districts can rely on local funding sources for 47 percent of their total income and do not pay for any of their facility costs, TIS does not get any money from local taxes or levies and must use 13 percent of its limited budget to meet facility costs. The per-pupil cost of the school is \$8,820, which includes all intergenerational programs, summer school, and meal programs, but TIS receives only \$7,616 per pupil from the state. As a result, TIS must raise about \$1,204 per student on an annual basis.

Student Achievement at the Intergenerational School (TIS)

- TIS is the only community school in Ohio thus far that has been rated “excellent” for three consecutive years by the Ohio Department of Education.
- State tests show that even students who did not complete a full TIS developmental stage in a given year generally achieved proficiency. For example, of the 39 percent of students who did not complete a full stage during the 2005–06 school year, 88 percent scored proficient on state reading assessments.
- Compared to the performance of African-American students in the wealthier, suburban Cleveland districts of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights-University Heights, TIS students scored higher on state proficiency exams in 2005–06.
- In 2005–06, TIS made adequate yearly progress, whereas the local district, Cleveland Municipal District, did not.
- As show in figure 17, in 2005–06, 100 percent of TIS third-graders and sixth-graders scored proficient or above on Ohio Achievement Tests (OAT) in reading and mathematics. Also, TIS students in third and fifth grades significantly outperformed students in the local school district in reading and mathematics.

Figure 17. Percentage of TIS Students Scoring Proficient or Higher on 2005–06 OAT Reading and Mathematics



Source: Ohio Department of Education, School Report Cards 2005–06.

Pan-American Elementary Charter School

Phoenix

| School Profile: Selected Variables ^a | |
|---|---|
| Year First Chartered | 2001 |
| Grades Served | K–7 |
| Enrollment | 270 |
| Student Ethnicity ^b | 97.0% Hispanic 2.0% African-American .04% White |
| Special Education | Less than 5% |
| Free or Reduced-price Lunch ^b | 98% |
| English Language Learners | 62% |
| Annual Cost per Student | \$6,109 |

^a Unless otherwise indicated, these data are reported by the school and are for the school year 2006–07.

^b These data are reported online for 2005–06 at <http://www.schoolmatters.com>.

Mission and Founding

Founded by a principal and her teacher-husband who, while both working in public schools, recognized the potential of charter schools, the Pan-American Elementary Charter School (PAES) overcame a rocky start to flourish as a school that embodies a sense of family. From its full-day kindergarten to its after-school tutoring and Saturday school, the PAES program is designed to improve the lives of all the children the school serves.

PAES’s written mission statement promises that the school will “ignite in every child the wonder of learning and ... provide meaningful educational experiences in a safe and caring environment.” It also includes PAES’s plan for fulfilling this mission: to use standards-based teaching adjusted to the individual student’s abilities and to supplement the curriculum with foreign language (English or Spanish, depending on the student) instruction and exposure.

Founder Marta Pasos drafted the charter for the school during evenings, weekends, and vacations from her job as an administrator of a 1,400 student K–8 public school in Phoenix. PAES received the charter for the school in 2001 and intended to open in August 2001, but postponed building inspections for the new school

delayed its opening for a month. After some families gave up on enrolling that year, the 200 preenrolled students dropped down to 94, and the school was forced to lay off teachers hired in anticipation of the larger enrollment. The state funds that the Pasos were expecting were withheld for five months, arriving in the middle of the school year. “We did not receive one cent from the state [from] Nov. 15, 2001 until April 15, 2002,” says Pasos, explaining that she and her husband took out personal loans to keep the fledgling school aloft.

Despite this rough start, PAES more than doubled its student population during its inaugural year, ending the school year with 195 students. By the second year, the school had enough students to offer two classes for each of the K–2 grades and enough money to pay off the Pasos’ debts. They even made plans to purchase a building. Pasos also looked out for her staff during this time and, as soon as possible, she gave them a bonus for making it through the bumpy start. In the 2003–04 school year, PAES was able to cover all of its operating costs through state per-pupil funding and federal categorical funds (e.g., special education), and it received financing from a local bank to buy a building. According to Pasos, the complete turnaround, from the fiscal uncertainty and low student numbers of year

one to the financial sturdiness and healthy student population of year three, can be attributed to “not contracting out services. ... [and] doing everything we can ourselves.”

School Operations and Educational Program

PAES currently serves 270 students across grades K–7, 97 percent of whom are Hispanic and 98 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The school’s 98 percent student retention rate and a 95 percent staff retention rate indicate high satisfaction within the PAES community. Indeed, the school has a waiting list of 20–30 students at any given time without formal advertising or fund-raising appeals; word-of-mouth from families to their friends and coworkers functions as PAES’s only recruiting tool.

Tucked away in a building in the back of a parking lot, PAES starts every school day with an 8 a.m. opening assembly outside. Wearing the red shirts and khaki pants required by the school’s dress code, students are in school for at least seven hours a day and may elect to use the teacher-run tutoring provided after the school day ends at 3 p.m. The climate inside the building is warm and encouraging; the hallway bulletin boards are filled with student work and monthly recognition of students who score above 80 percent on Accelerated Reader. The school has what members of the school community refer to as a family spirit among staff and the families. By knowing the people you serve well, Pasos says, “You can better meet their needs.”

The PAES curriculum was designed to respond to its student population. A full 100 percent of students enter the school achieving below grade level, Pasos indicates. Offering a full-day kindergarten program, in contrast to Arizona’s half-day programs in most public schools, has yielded

large achievement benefits. The full-day program enables PAES teachers to cover the state-mandated kindergarten standards in half a year and move onto the first half of the first-grade standards during the second part of the year. As a result, students are at least a half-grade ahead of their peers in other public schools. For example, outside the first-grade classroom, the work on display showed that students have solved math word problems that required reading complex sentences and have written up the answers in neat handwriting. Pasos explains that the school teaches handwriting using graph paper, so that as the students master letter formation, students use increasingly smaller graph paper until they are ready to switch to lined notebooks for writing assignments. PAES second-graders learn multiplication and its fourth-graders read such books as *Charlotte’s Web* and work on a variety of writing modes, including research reports, literary responses, persuasive arguments, expository newspaper articles, expressive short stories, and poetry.

Prior to students starting full-day kindergarten, PAES invites them to attend a six-week summer session. Once in kindergarten, students have two teachers, one English-speaking and one who is Spanish-dominant. The English speaker teaches literacy for half the day and the Spanish-dominant speaker teaches math, social studies, and vocabulary for the other half in Spanish. Starting in kindergarten, all students receive homework, and parents are expected to read with their children daily and sign a reading log.

One third-grade teacher noted that within any classroom, which might contain between 18 and 32 students, “We teach to the top half of the class, and the rest will follow.” To ensure that struggling students can make this leap, teachers tutor students after school, offer a Saturday education program each week from January to April, and provide summer school in June and

July. All of these activities are open to every PAES student, but teachers make sure to identify those who would most benefit from these extras and encourage them to use the services.

In second through sixth grade, classes use the Accelerated Reader program. Students take weekly tests and need to score 80 percent or better to move to the next level. Because so few students are read to at home, as a way to encourage them to embrace reading, Pasos urges teachers to read aloud to students, using inflection to portray characters as actors would. At the end of every grading period, PAES recognizes perfect attendance and academic achievement with parties and raffles. Participation in the school's twice-yearly coed soccer tournament is dependent on good study habits and attendance, which further encourages students to work hard and come to school. Luis Pasos, who coordinates the tournament, says the rule for participation is: "You don't study, you don't play."

The curriculum is tied to state standards and the AIMS (Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards) test, administered every spring. But because the AIMS results are often not available until after school is out in June, PAES also monitors student progress with teacher-designed assessments in math, reading, and writing. The accelerated curriculum has paid off as test results have improved, and many of the 62 percent ELL students are able to relinquish that designation.

In addition to Marta and Luis Pasos, PAES's 20 staff members include 12 teachers and an assistant principal. A committee of teachers interviews candidates for school positions, and Pasos is selective about the teachers she ultimately hires. Pasos sets high expectations for her staff and works personally with teachers to help them meet her goals. When possible, Pasos awards her staff with pay bonuses. Giving financial rewards to all of her staff helps

Pasos show that the school not only succeeds when the staff works together, but also that the school community appreciates their hard work and recognizes their achievements. To that end, the school set up 401(k) plans for teachers, so PAES can pay into their retirement; with the passage of Proposition 301, an education sales tax passed by voters in November 2000, PAES can provide retirement for all of its employees.

Family Involvement and Partnerships

Cooperation between parents and PAES staff is critical to the school's success. "Parents are partners with us," says Pasos. "I tell them 'I need to have your support to effectively educate your child.'" Parents support the school's operations in both passive and active ways. By complying with the school's calendar and waiting to schedule family trips for school vacation periods, parents reflexively demonstrate their commitment to the school's mission and help yield a 97 percent attendance rate. Approximately 98 percent of the students return to PAES each year. By attending parent-teacher conferences and science fairs and by helping in the cafeteria, as well as with such events as the Back to School Fiesta, parents put into practice their support of PAES.

The school works hard to involve parents in their students' lives. Teachers speak with parents daily and send written progress reports to parents in English and Spanish every four-and-a-half weeks. The Spanish-speaking office manager helps non-Spanish-speaking teachers communicate with parents. One Saturday in January, PAES also offers Parent University, a program to teach parents how to work with their children on mathematics and reading, as well as how to research high schools and other educational opportunities.

PAES partakes in several community partnerships, such as one with Arizona State University (ASU) through which PAES students participate in ASU's Programs for Talented Youth. The school nominated 15 children, all of whom were accepted, to this Saturday enrichment program. Despite the \$250 cost, all of the families of the accepted children scraped together the money and carpoled to take their children to ASU. These trips were, for many families, the first time anyone had been on a college campus. "It was an eye-opener," says Pasos. "For many, it was the first time they considered university as an option for their kids. We had several families calling their families in Mexico saying, 'You know, my son is going to ASU; he is going to the university in Phoenix!' " In another partnership with Arizona Commission on the Arts, PAES hosts artists-in-residence who work with students. Past artists have taught Japanese taiko drumming, Chinese origami, calligraphy and brush painting, and folk tales.

Governing for Accountability

Marta and Luis Pasos embody a "do it ourselves" mentality, and PAES is a family affair. Marta and Luis take care of operating tasks, such as payroll, maintenance, business management, and busing, with Luis driving one of the buses. In the sixth year of PAES, the Pasos' son, Todd Wade, who taught for five years at PAES, became the assistant principal. Also, teachers helped to write and develop the scope and sequence of the school curriculum. The only contractor is an accountant who monitors school finances to ensure that the school stays in compliance with the law.

In 2006–07, Arizona provided PAES with \$6,080.77 per student, but the actual per-stu-

dent cost is \$6,109.77. To make up the difference, the school has applied for and received grants from arts organizations and foundations. The state does not provide charter schools with funding for transportation, so PAES decided to use some of its operational funds to buy three buses, making it possible to transport the 96 percent of its student body who live within an eight-mile radius. Luis Pasos comments that "It was a conscious decision to provide transportation. ... [For] anybody who wanted to come to our school. For any parent who was willing to trust us with the education of their children and was willing to support the school, we would, as much as possible, provide transportation." Parents, appreciative of the busing, provided regular donations for transportation costs voluntarily. When gas prices subsequently soared, the school asked parents to pay \$5 per week to help with the increased cost.

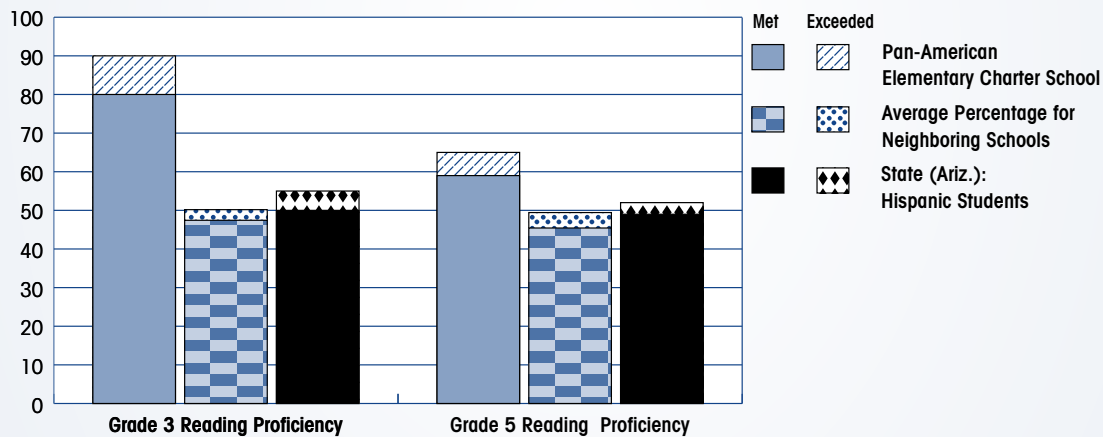
Teachers have a weekly, 45-minute staff meeting on Mondays and meet after school on Fridays to plan together. Once a quarter, the school holds professional in-service days that are used to discuss how to better serve students, to set annual goals, and to analyze test data to improve instruction. PAES staff also participate in distance learning courses to better prepare to teach English language learners.

A five-member charter school board, including Marta and Luis Pasos, Todd Wade, as well as a teacher and a community member, oversees the school. In 2006, PAES passed the state's five-year review of PAES's ten-year charter, a milestone that reflects PAES's fiscal and academic successes.

Student Achievement at Pan-American Elementary Charter School (PAES)

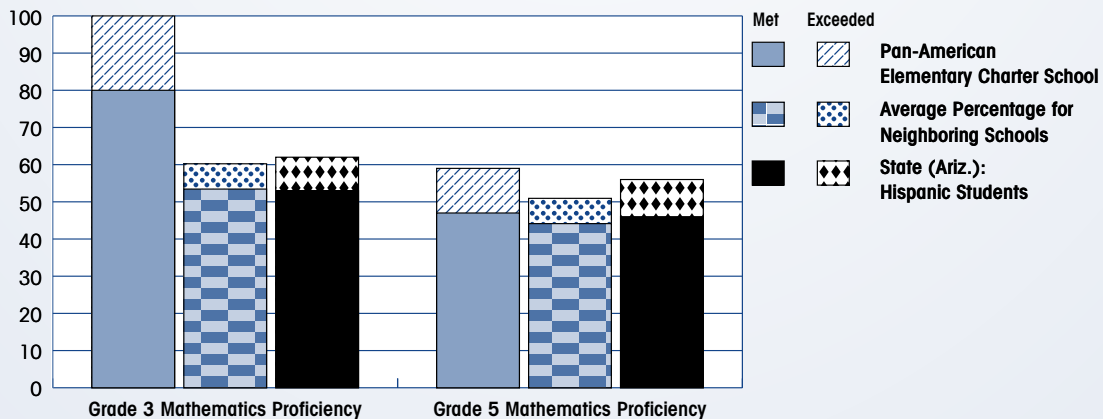
- PAES has made adequate yearly progress for the past three years and received a “Performing Plus” ranking by the Arizona Department of Education in 2005–06.
- As show in figures 18 and 19, third- and fifth-grade students at PAES outperformed their peers at neighboring elementary schools and outperformed Hispanic students at the state level in both reading and mathematics on the 2005–06 Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS).

Figure 18. Percentage of PAES Students Meeting or Exceeding Proficiency on 2005–06 AIMS Reading



Source: Arizona Department of Education, School Report Cards 2006–07

Figure 19. Percentage of PAES Students Meeting or Exceeding Proficiency on 2005–06 AIMS Mathematics



Source: Arizona Department of Education, School Report Cards 2006–07



APPENDIX A

Research Methodology

The research approach used to develop this guide is a combination of case study methodology and benchmarking of “best practices.” Used in businesses worldwide as they seek to continuously improve their operations, more recently benchmarking has been applied to education. Benchmarking is a structured, efficient process that targets key operations and identifies the following: promising practices in relationship to traditional practice, previous practice at the selected sites (lessons learned), and local outcome data. The methodology used here is further explained in a background document,²⁴ which lays out the justification for identifying promising practices based on four sources of rigor in the approach:

- Theory and research base;
- Expert review;
- Site evidence of effectiveness; and
- Systematic field research and cross-site analysis.

The steps of the research process were: defining a study scope, seeking input from experts to refine the scope and inform site selection criteria, screening potential sites, selecting sites to study, conducting site visits, collecting and analyzing data to write case reports, and writing a user-friendly guide.

Study Framework and Data Collection

A conceptual framework was developed to guide the study of the selected sites. While many things happen at a busy school site, each case study needed to focus on those practices most likely to contribute to a school’s success. The framework for this study was an adaptation of that used in a previous guide on charter schools in this Innovations in Education series,²⁵ which was derived from the research literature on charter schools and on organizational effectiveness. The dimensions of the conceptual framework were *mission-driven school, school operations and educational program, family involvement and external partnerships, and governing for accountability*. A site visit to each school was conducted to gather the information for this guide. Each visit lasted for one or two days and included informal observations throughout the school, attendance at events, and interviews. The primary source of data was interviews with a variety of key groups, including parents, teachers, board members, administrators, and school partners. An interview protocol was developed based on the study framework and adapted to each role group. That is, separate but overlapping sets of questions were developed for teachers, administrators, parents, and other interviewees. Interviews were digitally recorded

with key interviewees and later transcribed for more detailed analysis.

Documents from each school served as an additional source of information. Collected during the site visit, these documents included such items as school schedules, sample assessments, lesson plan forms, teacher planning protocols, newsletters, application forms, brochures, charter plans, and report cards. Principals and executive directors also completed a standard form to facilitate consistent compiling of school demographic and outcome information.

Site Selection Process

For this guide, a school had to show evidence of closing the achievement gap. Based on state standardized test data, closing the achievement gap means that students are outperforming local district public schools that serve a similar population of students in mathematics and reading. Alternately, closing the gap may mean that certain subgroups—including African-American and Hispanic students, those receiving special education services, English language learners, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (an indicator of family poverty)—are outperforming either state averages or district students from the same subgroup. Schools included in this guide also must have met adequate yearly progress (AYP) for at least the past two consecutive years. They must each serve a student body where at least half of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and half are students of color.

After examining AYP, student demographics, and achievement gap data from Washington,

D.C. and all 40 states with charter school legislation, an initial list of candidates included approximately 187 schools from 30 different states and Washington, D.C. Based on recommendations from an external advisory group of charter school researchers, charter school practitioners, and representatives from various organizations working to support charter schools, information from state department staff and state association leaders, and review of achievement data, the initial list was narrowed down to 22 schools. These schools served students in kindergarten through eighth grade, had met AYP for at least the past two consecutive years, had a full grade set of elementary-school-age students, and served at least 50 percent of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch programs, at least 50 percent of the school population were students of color, and demonstrated evidence of closing achievement gaps. After screening data, 18 schools were selected and information about program features and additional outcome data were collected using phone interviews to fill gaps in information.

From this group of 18 schools, seven schools were ultimately chosen as case study sites, based on the compiled information and criteria ratings on a screening matrix. Demographic variation, a range of promising practices, geographic location, and achievement data all were considered in the final site selection.

Selection Criteria

A cross-section of schools were selected to highlight K-8 charter schools successfully meeting the needs of traditionally underserved popula-

tions of students (e.g., low income, special education, African-American and Latino students), with strong academic programs serving a range of grade configurations (e.g., pre-K–8, K–7, 5–8, K–12) and in a range of geographic locations, all making academic achievement gains. Schools were selected based on the following criteria, prioritized by the advisory group as key issues for consideration.

Demographic Criteria

Many schools demonstrated that they were working hard to educate students, who have been largely underserved in traditional public schools. The schools that were selected had student populations with two or more of the following characteristics: Sixty percent or more qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, 60 percent or more are African-American, Hispanic, or both; 10 percent or more receive special education services, and 60 percent or more are English language learners.

Achievement Criteria

Schools selected met AYP targets for at least two consecutive years, including the most recent year for which data were available. Researchers looked for schools that scored at least at the 50th percentile in mathematics or reading on state standardized tests with demonstrated evidence of continued improvement over several years, or for schools that were consistently high achieving, ranking in the 90th percentile range annually. Data from state departments of education Web sites and the Web site SchoolMatters.com provided achievement information.

Achievement Gap Criteria

Researchers looked for additional evidence that schools were making progress eliminating achievement gaps. A school was considered to be narrowing the achievement gaps if, internally, gaps among students of different races and socioeconomic backgrounds were closing over time or if the school was demonstrating higher achievement for low-income, minority, or students receiving special education services in comparison with a similar population of students in its local district public schools.

Analysis and Reporting

A case report was written about each site, and reviewed by site administrators for accuracy. From these case reports, artifacts, and transcripts of interviews, the project team identified common themes that contributed to success across the sites. This cross-site analysis was built using both the research literature as reflected in the study scope as well as emerging patterns in the data.

This descriptive research process suggests promising practices, including ways to do things that other educators have found helpful and lessons they have learned, as well as practical how-to guidance. This is not the kind of experimental research that can yield valid causal claims about what works. Readers should judge for themselves the merits of these practices, based on their understanding of why they should work, how they fit the local context, and what happens when they actually try them. Also, readers should understand that these descriptions do not constitute an endorsement of specific practices or products.

Using the Guide

Ultimately, readers of this guide will need to select, adapt, and implement practices that meet their individual needs and contexts. Schools coming together in learning communities may

continue to study, using the ideas and practices from these sites as a springboard for their own action research. In this way, a pool of promising practices will grow, and schools can support each other in implementation and learning.



APPENDIX B

Resources

Charter Schools

US Charter Schools Web site

The US Charter Schools Web site provides a wide range of information and links to resources to guide charter schools in every phase of their development—from start-up to expansion, to renewal. The site includes a national calendar of events and a community-exchange feature.

<http://www.uscharterschools.org>

Education Commission of the States

The Education Commission of the States includes both charter schools and charter districts as issue topics on its Web site. The site includes a searchable database on high school research and high school policy topics, including closing the achievement gap.

<http://www.ecs.org>

National Charter School Research Project

Based at the Center on Reinventing Public Education, the National Charter School Research Project is developing a database of studies on charter school achievement and collecting charter school data from the states. This project is generating several research studies, focusing on student achievement in charter schools and on building capacity to scale up charter schools.

<http://www.crpe.org>

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Web site provides a variety of online publications related to charter school development, policies, and performance, a charter blog, and a database for comparing charter school policies.

<http://www.publiccharters.org>

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation provides links to major studies and to over 50 other organizations' Web sites in the area of charter schools and choice.

<http://www.edexcellence.net>

Center for Education Reform

The Center for Education Reform provides up-to-date reports on charter schools and choice activity around the country. The Web site also links to “fast facts” and resources designed with parents in mind. A searchable database identifies resources and charter schools in each state.

<http://www.edreform.com>

U.S. Department of Education: Public Charter Schools Program

The Office of Innovation and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education operates the public Charter Schools Program, which supports the planning, development, and initial implementation of charter schools. Other grants target support for charter school facilities.

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/charter/index.html>

Achievement Gap

Education Trust

The Education Trust Web site provides reports, resources, data, and policy information about the achievement gap.

<http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust>

SchoolMatters

SchoolMatters is a Web site of Standard & Poor’s that provides national-, state-, district-, and school-level information about school demographics and student achievement. It includes a search tool to identify charter schools and another tool to compare their data to those of other district and state schools.

<http://www.schoolmatters.com>



Notes

¹ U.S. Department of Education, n.d. *Nation's Report Card Shows Continued Progress—General*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/achieve/report-card.html>. Last accessed on May 30, 2007.

² The Education Trust, 2005. *Closing the Achievement Gap: 2005 NAEP Reading and Math Results Show Some Gains, But Slowing Progress*. Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust. Available at <http://www2.edtrust.org/EDTrust/Press+Room/NAEP+2005.htm>. Last accessed on June 1, 2007.

³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, n.d. *Education Indicators for the White House Social Statistics Briefing Room (SSBR)*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/ssbr/-pages/mathematics.asp?IndID=29>. Last accessed on May 30, 2007.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005. *Average Scale Scores and Achievement-Level Results in Mathematics for Students With Disabilities*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics. Available at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nrc/reading_math_2005/s0029.asp?printver=. Last accessed on June 3, 2007.

⁵ North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004. *Perspectives on the Gaps: Fostering the Academic Success of Minority and Low-Income Students*. Naperville, Ill.: Learning Points Associates. Available at <http://search.learningpt.org/query.html?qt=Perspectives+on+the+Gaps%3A+Fostering+the+Academic>. Last accessed on July 23, 2007.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004. *Successful Charter Schools*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2006. *Charter High Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

⁷ The Center for Education Reform, 2006. *All About Charter Schools (CER Quick Facts)*. Washington, D.C.: The Center for Education Reform. Available at <http://www.edreform.com/index.cfm?fuseAction=document&documentID=1964>. Last accessed on May 30, 2007.

⁸ Finn, Jr., C. E., Hassel, B. C., and Speakman, S., August 2005. *Charter School Funding: Inequity's Next Frontier*. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Progress Analytics Institute, and Public Impact. Available at <http://www.edexcellence.net/institute/charterfinance>. Last accessed on July 23, 2007.

⁹ Lake, R. J. and Hill, P. T., eds., 2005. *Hopes, Fears & Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2005* (p. 15). Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education, National Charter School Research Project. Available at http://www.ncsrp.org/downloads/HopesandFears2005_report.pdf. Last accessed on June 30, 2007.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, October 2005. *Digest of Education Statistics: 2004* (Table 100). Available at http://www.nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/tables/dt04_100.asp?referrer=list. Last accessed on August 17, 2007.

¹² Hoxby, C. M., 2004. *Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Differences*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University and National Bureau of Economic Research.

¹³ Hamilton, L. S. and Stecher, B. M., 2006. "A Better Way of Measuring Charter School Success and Failure," chapter 6 in *Hopes, Fears, and Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2006*, R. J. Lake and P. T. Hill, eds. Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education, National Charter School Research Project.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Deputy Secretary, 2004. *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. Available

at <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/choice/pcsp-final/index.html>. Last accessed on June 1, 2007.

¹⁵ *Unraveling the "Teacher Shortage" Problem: Teacher Retention is the Key*, Aug. 20–22, 2002. A symposium of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and NCTAF State Partners, Washington D.C. Available at http://www.ncsu.edu/mentorjunction/text_files/teacher_retentionsymposium.pdf. Last accessed July 17, 2007.

¹⁶ A 2003 survey of California charter schools by the Reason Foundation found school directors reported using aggressive early intervention strategies and remediation strategies to help reduce the rate of special education classification of students. Reason Foundation, Special Education Survey, as found in L. Snell, 2004. *Special Education Accountability: Structural Report to Help Charter Schools Make the Grade*. Los Angeles: Reason Foundation, Reason Public Policy Institute. Available at <http://www.reason.org/ps319.pdf>. Last accessed on June 1, 2007.

¹⁷ A 2002 report from the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education reported that two out of five special education students are assigned to the program "simply because they haven't learned how to read." U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2002. *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. Available at http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecaleducation/reports/images/Pres_Rep.pdf. Last accessed on June 30, 2007.

¹⁸ Research shows that English language learners "... historically have suffered from disproportionate assignment to lower curriculum tracks on the basis of inappropriate assessment and, as a result, from over-referral to special education." In La Celle-Peterson, M. W. and Rivera, C., Spring 1994. "Is It Real for All Kids? A Framework for Equitable Assessment Policies for English Language Learners," *Harvard Educational Review* 64, no. 1, p. 2. Available at http://ceee.gwu.edu/products_ELLS/isitreal.pdf. Last accessed on July 7, 2007.

¹⁹ *2004–05 Chicago Public Schools: Charter Schools Performance Report*. Available at http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/docs/2004-2005_Performance_Report.pdf. Last accessed on July 3, 2007.

²⁰ According to section C-4 of the U.S. Department of Education's *Charter Schools Program, Title IV, Part B, Non-regulatory Guidance* (July 2004), the following students may be exempted from a charter school's admissions lottery: students enrolled in a public school at the time it is converted to a charter school, current students' siblings, children of charter school's founders, and children of employees in a work-site charter school (so long as the total number of students allowed under this exemption constitutes only a small percentage of the school's total enrollment).

²¹ Moses, R. P. and Cobb, Jr., C. E., 2001. *Radical Equations: Math Literacy and Civil Rights* (p. 5). Boston: Beacon Press.

²² CCA's alternative licensing program requires completion of course work, school-based training and mentoring, and observation and monitoring of the integration of effective practices. To qualify, candidates apply, document 30 semester hours of courses in their content field, pass state-required tests, and agree to be evaluated by the Colorado Department of Education. After one year these teachers receive a provisional credential and after two more years of supervised work they are awarded their professional credential.

²³ Brodsky, A., 2005. *390,343 Children Left Behind: Who's Closing the Achievement Gap in Colorado's Schools?* (pp. 2, 17–18). Denver: Colorado Children's Campaign. Available at http://www.coloradokids.org/our_issues/k12_education/projects.html. Last accessed on June 2, 2007.

²⁴ Filby, N., 2006. "Approach to Methodological Rigor in the Innovation Guides," working paper. San Francisco: WestEd.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004. *Successful Charter Schools*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charter/index.html>.



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