

New Haven Federation of Teachers

LOCAL 933  AFL-CIO

An Affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers



*David Cicarella
President*

January 21, 2015

To: All NHFT Members
From: David Cicarella, NHFT President
Re: Achievement First Charter School Proposal

The proposal for an Achievement First charter school partnering with the New Haven Public Schools is of great concern. We cannot and do not support this proposal. It should also be of equal concern to the New Haven BoE and our superintendent. Achievement First is an organization that has touted superior student achievement while not "doing what we do". They do not service the same students. Sending students that "do not fit in" back to us is downright wrong. Public schools, whether charter or traditional, must all operate under the same policies and practices.

- We do not close our doors to students on October 1st as Achievement First schools do. This affords them the unfair advantage of not dealing with the student mobility issue that is so disruptive throughout the year.
- NHPS teachers are required by state law to provide a fair and appropriate public education to all students with IEP's and those identified as ELL. Achievement First pays lip-service to attending to the needs of these students while in fact maintaining a much smaller enrollment percentage of these students.
- NHPS is committed to giving students multiple pathways to earn a high school diploma and support students' pursuit of fulfilling secondary outcomes. This includes both 2 year and 4 year colleges, certificate programs, and other areas of employment. Achievement First boosts "100% college attendance" for their seniors by systemically weeding out students not on track for college.
- NHPS enrolls all students. Not only does Achievement First refuse K-8 students after October 1st, their high schools then only accept applications from AF graduating eighth graders. So after returning virtually all of their discipline problems to the NHPS through grade 8 they then only consider students that have been creamed off the top from schools in their network.

The above is now old news yet a continued source of irritation for all traditional public school systems and their teachers. Achievement First has now proposed to draft language to establish policies whereby they will take their "fair share" of challenging students, reserve seats for students entering throughout the year, and eliminate the midyear return of students that "don't fit in", which as we all know are all discipline problems.

My response to our superintendent and Achievement First was these are policies that should have been in place for years! "Doing what is right" should not be a precondition for obtaining another charter school. The timing is just so obvious. Achievement First wants a new charter school and now asks to partner with the NHFT and the NHPS. Of course they do. We remain at the center of the School Reform movement nationwide and charter schools are under fire. So they now want to attach themselves to us to gain acceptance and legitimacy. If they truly cared about those "40,000 students trapped in failing schools" as they profess, then they should be taking as many of them as they can into their network and not hide behind exclusionary policies which are under their control to change.

Achievement First has argued that students need another school as an option. However, we do not know if Achievement First schools (Amistad, etc.) will have the same student achievement results if operated under the same conditions as NHPS. Our colleagues everywhere dealing with a student population as challenging as ours know for sure that they will never replicate those student achievement scores if and when they muster the courage to "do what we do". Instead, the NHFT, New Haven BOE, and NHPS should insist that Achievement First adopt all enrollment and transfer policies identical to those of the NHPS in all schools across their network so we can then review the student achievement data at the end of the next school year and succeeding years. This will provide hard data for our analysis and allow transparency for informed decisions. Negative accusatory rhetoric has no place in our arena. New Haven teachers have stepped forward and helped end the destructive cycle of blame and finger pointing from various groups. We have collaborated and partnered with the NHPS dealing with tough issues along the way. Both sides have made reasonable compromises to best serve our students. We call on Achievement First to do the same.