

ACHIEVEMENT FIRST: DEVELOPING A TEACHER PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM THAT RECOGNIZES EXCELLENCE



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1** OVERVIEW
- 2** INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
- 4** PERFORMANCE CULTURE
- 6** DEVELOPING THE ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION
- 10** ORGANIZING THE ESSENTIALS
 - 10** New Teacher Training and Support
 - 10** Coaching
 - 12** Learning Plans
 - 12** Professional Growth Plans
- 14** THE POWER OF THE ESSENTIALS
- 15** TEACHER CAREER PATHWAY
 - 18** The Stages of the Career Pathway and Progression from One Stage to the Next
 - 18** Rewards and Incentives Tied to the Career Pathway
 - 19** Implementation
- 21** CONCLUSION
- 23** APPENDIX A: The Cycle of Highly Effective Teaching
- 24** APPENDIX B: The Essentials of Effective Instruction
- 26** APPENDIX C: Achievement First Professional Growth Plan
- 35** APPENDIX D: Teaching Excellence Framework
- 37** APPENDIX E: Achievement First Teacher Career Pathway

OVERVIEW

Teachers are the single most important school-related factor in students' learning, and improving student learning is the single most important goal at Achievement First (AF), a fast-growing public charter school network in the Northeast. To achieve this goal, the AF team has worked to establish a common understanding of effective instructional practices across the network, which they believe is vital to ensuring consistent teaching quality and student results across all network schools. These Essentials anchor AF's emerging performance management system, guiding teacher support, accountability, compensation, and advancement.

For the last three years, the Aspen Institute's Urban Superintendents Network has focused on the design and implementation of a robust human capital management system. This group of superintendents is very clear that human capital issues must be thought of strategically and systemically. This means that clear teaching standards serve as the bedrock on which a system develops support and accountability for teachers. Student learning informs the assessment of teaching, and support must be aligned to evaluation results. Finally, evaluation results must inform compensation. In looking for images of holistic, well-integrated approaches, AF's work surfaced as a focused attempt to weave all of these components together. It is nascent work to be watched as it develops. There are many school systems that, along with their partners, are trying to simultaneously solve the teacher evaluation problem and create a professional performance management system. They can learn from AF's efforts.

A look at AF's performance management system is particularly timely, given the growing national awareness that the current teacher evaluation system is broken. As school systems, teachers unions, and their partners work to fix it, the response needs to address more than the issues of binary ratings and weak implementation. It must envision a performance management system that is grounded in rigorous teaching standards; that includes both input and output measures; and that integrates support, accountability, compensation, and advancement, as is done in other sectors.

This profile tells the story of AF's development of teaching standards, how it organized teacher support and accountability to accompany them, and how it used that early work to develop a comprehensive teacher performance management system. The four critical lessons learned from AF's work that are explored in detail in this profile are:

- 1 Create standards for effective instruction as the foundation of a performance management system and develop them in a way that taps the system's internal capacity, builds teacher and administrator engagement, and draws from the growing body of research in this area.**
- 2 Ensure that teacher evaluation, professional development, and support are all aligned to standards for effective instruction.**
- 3 Communicate clearly from the start that instructional standards are one element of assessing teacher effectiveness and are a means to the end of student achievement.**
- 4 Anticipate and use learning from early efforts in developing a performance management system and refining the system based on the learning (think software 1.0 and 2.0).**

These learnings are generalizable to any effort to establish standards and build a comprehensive teacher performance management system. When used to inform such work they have the potential to accelerate teacher development, recognize excellence, professionalize teach-

INTRODUCTION

Amistad Academy, the founding school from which the AF network was built, developed criteria for instructional practices organically in its early years of existence. As the AF network developed, it became clear that the teaching standards needed to be expanded upon and refined to be robust enough to serve as the network's guiding force for instruction.

In 2008, AF began the process of building its *Essentials of Effective Instruction*. Over a two-year period, the network developed the Essentials and organized a set of structures on them that included classroom-based instructional coaching, an annual cycle for teachers of professional growth planning, and short-cycle learning plans. In 2010, AF expanded this work to recognize teaching excellence. The network created a teacher career pathway that provided five stages of teacher development and performance – from “Intern” to “Master Teacher” – and aligned compensation, development opportunities, and recognition to them. AF built on its existing structures of support and accountability by more clearly defining and quantifying key inputs and student outcomes as measures of teacher effectiveness. These criteria guide teachers' movement through the stages of the career pathway.

BACKGROUND

Hundreds of teachers stream into the Achievement First Endeavor Middle School's gym. The din rises and the energy is palpable as teachers and administrators from the public charter network's 17 schools in Connecticut and New York come together for a network-wide professional development day. Greetings are shouted across the room. Bagels and juice fly off the breakfast table and teachers drop their bags to the gym floor as they settle into folding chairs, organizing themselves by school communities. The crowd is diverse, energetic, and young.

With the whole network community together before dispersing for a day of workshops led by teachers, administrators, and network leaders, Dacia Toll, the Co-CEO and President of AF and one of the network's co-founders, kicks off the day with these words: “We are an organization with soul. It's not just what we do; it's how we do it.” With that, Ms. Toll tells the story of her recent meeting with a parent at one of the schools. The story reminds the crowd of the tremendous potential and needs of the students and families it serves. It also serves to illustrate the profound impact that each of the hundreds of people squeezed into the gym can have every day. The story is followed up by a video of AF's first class of high school seniors, giving shout outs as they read their college acceptance letters, talking about “climbing the mountain to college” and how they know education equals opportunity. As students in the video announce where they are going to college, the crowd in the gym roars in celebration.

Ms. Toll's story and the students' words are echoed in the brightly colored banners hanging from the gym's rafters. They provide a visual display of Achievement First's core values: No Excuses, Excellence is a Habit, Whatever it Takes, Team Always Beats Individual, Academic Excellence and Strength of Character, Team and Family. The plenary session makes one thing crystal clear: these core values pertain to the adults who work at Achievement First as much as they pertain to the students they teach.

The leaders of Amistad Academy, a high-performing charter school started in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1999, created Achievement First (AF), a public school charter network in 2003. Their goal in creating the network was to bring to scale the educational program Amistad Academy had created and the promising student results it had realized. Since its launch, AF has founded two to four new schools each year, growing into a network of 17 urban public charter schools serving 4,500 students, K-12, in New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford, Connecticut, and in New York City. Its growth projections aim to have a network of 30 schools serving 12,000 students by 2012.

Achievement First schools are united by a deep commitment to educational opportunity for all students and a strong performance culture. They all serve students who live in Connecticut's and New York's lowest-income communities; 73 percent of the students who attend AF schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The goal of the network is as simple as it is radical: to provide poor students of color from chronically underserved communities with a high-quality education that prepares them to compete with students from neighboring affluent, high-performing school districts for acceptance into competitive colleges and in the world beyond schooling. AF is tenaciously focused on outcomes and sets its achievement targets to meet or exceed those of affluent communities in New York and Connecticut.

Schools in the network are funded following the state per-pupil allocation provided to public district schools. That allocation is provided directly to the schools and they pay AF a fee for network support (between 8 percent and 10 percent of public revenues). This support includes curriculum scope-and-sequence guides, content-area expertise and support, a system of interim assessments aligned to state standards, professional development for teachers and school administrators, and a host of operational supports. Schools are provided additional start-up funds by the network in their first two to three years.

AF's expansion trajectory creates a tremendous demand for teachers. It also requires the development of systems and structures to support this continual influx of new teachers and to ensure that the things that made Amistad Academy successful inform the work in all network schools. At the same time, the network was organized to be nimble and dynamic, responding to the needs of its schools, staff, and students and anticipating that those needs would change over time and that network supports would evolve accordingly. This dual commitment to developing systems and structures and being dynamic required AF to communicate clear expectations and organize around them without letting them become static and/or inadvertently building a culture of complacency. The goal is to have expectations that evolve to reflect learning from within the network and beyond about how to ensure high-quality instruction and run schools where all children learn at high levels.

AF NETWORK STUDENT AVERAGE ACHIEVEMENT (2008-2009)

- + 7%** Student performance relative to state performance
- + 27%** Students performing at or above proficiency relative to local community performance

Grade	AF Performance Relative to Host District	AF Performance Relative to Host State
4 th Grade	+25%	+11%
8 th Grade	+26%	+3%
10 th Grade	+36%	+8%

These data are reported by Achievement First and reflect a comparison of average calculation of state, district, and AF network-wide achievement on Connecticut (reading, writing, math, science) and New York (English language arts, math) state assessments in all tested grades.

AF TEACHER PROFILE

- 42%** Black, Hispanic, Asian or American Indian
- 77%** Five Years or Less of Teaching Experience

SY '09-10 TEACHER HIRING

Teachers Hired as % of

- 42%** Workforce
- 36%** First-Year Teachers
- 23%** TFA Corp Members
- 33%** TFA Alums

PERFORMANCE CULTURE

Achievement First has a strong performance culture that is reflected in everything the network does. All the experiences in which students are engaged in AF schools are organized intentionally to drive student learning and achievement. The network's focus on teaching excellence through rigorous hiring, ongoing coaching, and regular feedback on teacher practice is based on the belief that teacher performance is the most important driver of student achievement. Performance expectations for coaches and principals as developers of teachers are similarly high to ensure their effectiveness in helping teachers improve their practice. And network staff are responsible for developing supports and tools that assist teachers, coaches, and principals in their work.

The emphasis on performance begins with the teacher recruitment and selection process. In finding teachers, AF screens for the attitudes and mindsets that the network's most effective teachers demonstrate. The infrastructure of induction and ongoing support for teachers is aimed at setting high expectations for teacher practice and providing teachers the support they need to achieve them. All teachers serve on one-year contracts and student results are a significant component of their evaluations. Even with a rigorous teacher screening process and lots of teacher supports, AF dismisses five percent of its teaching force annually for not meeting the network's standards. This rate is 500 times the average dismissal rate (0.01%) of the ten school systems studied in the report *The Widget Effect*.

Coaches and principals are expected to be the best teachers in their schools and to be able to coach teachers to higher performance. Their jobs are to support teacher development and ensure that they perform at the level required to drive student results. The coaches and principals are given great authority and are held accountable for results; principal compensation is based in part on student results.

AF's heavy investment in Athena, its system of interim assessments that are aligned to the New York and Connecticut state assessments, is another indication of its strong performance culture. Athena is administered five times a year in all grades in reading, writing, and math and less frequently in science and social studies in grades 5-8. The system provides teachers, coaches, principals, and the network as a whole data on the progress students are making in their learning, which is then used by teachers to inform instruction and by coaches and principals to inform teacher support and supervision.

Achievement First's Teaching and Learning Infrastructure

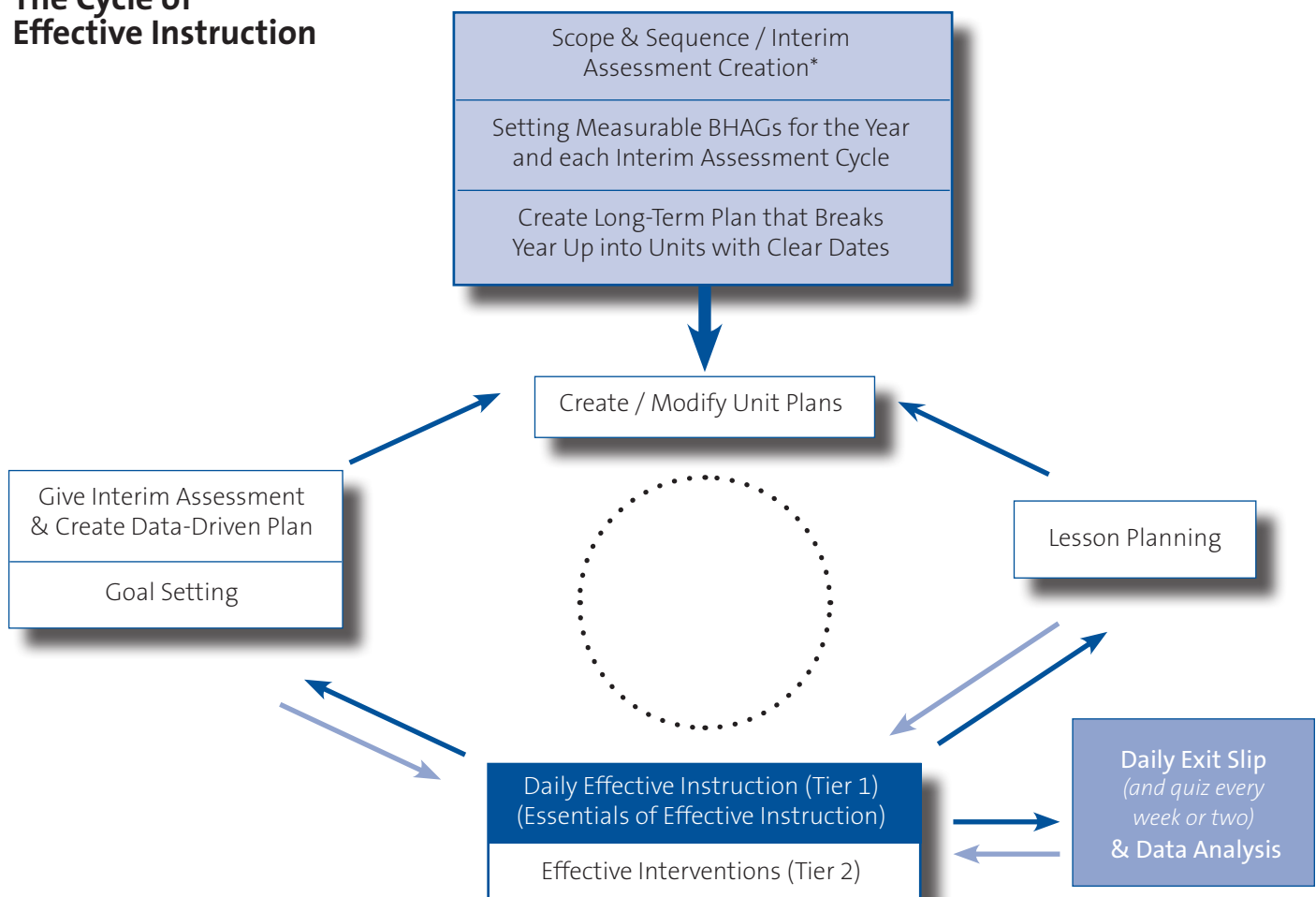
CLEAR EXPECTATIONS	ASSESSMENTS	CURRICULUM	INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS	TEACHER PLANNING TIME
AF Network has an AF Report Card that outlines “standing ovation” performance targets for student achievement and other key outcomes. The Report Card measures both student progress and absolute achievement, and the targets are set based on the highest-performing suburban districts and charter schools.	AF Network developed “Athena,” a system of custom-built, web-based interim assessments that are given every six weeks to assess student learning. The assessments are aligned to the AF curriculum scope and sequence, predictive of student performance on New York’s and Connecticut’s state annual assessments and are given to all students in all grades in reading, writing, and math five times a year. Students in grades five, six, seven, and eight are given less frequent assessments in science and social studies.	AF Network provides scope and sequence aligned to state standards and Athena assessments.	The network does not prescribe the materials schools use. It makes recommendations and there is a fair degree of consistency in the instructional materials used across the system.	Teachers have 90-120 minutes of planning and prep time per day; many teachers use some of this time for collaborative planning by grade level or content area.
AF Network developed the “Cycle of Highly Effective Teaching” (See Appendix A) to define the AF way of teaching. This cycle drives how AF teachers work. All of the other elements of AF’s teaching and learning infrastructure are either part of the cycle or are organized to support it.	All AF teachers participate in “Data Days,” which are full-day sessions focused on teacher analysis of Athena data to analyze student performance and develop instructional plans and strategies to address learning needs.	AF Network has created a commonly visited place on its server where teachers can share unit and lesson plans.	Schools customize and sequence the use of instructional programs and materials to align with when Athena assesses content. Teachers generally draw from a variety of resources e.g. Elementary Reading and Writing: Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop drawing from Fountes and Pinnell, Lucy Calkins, several different grammar resources, AF’s writing resource binder, Kids Writing, etc.; Elementary Math: combination of Saxon, TERC Investigations, Scott Foresman, Envisions, etc.	Schools sometimes focus the 120 minutes of weekly professional development time each school has on Friday afternoons on additional content team time.
By following the cycle, teachers move from the scope and sequence and aligned interim assessments the network provides to:	AF Teachers develop and give additional classroom-based assessments.	Teachers refine unit plans and collaborate to develop weekly and daily lesson plans which they submit to the principal for feedback.		
1 set goals for student learning 2 plan units and then lessons 3 teach 4 assess student learning and then begin the cycle again with the next round of goal setting.				

DEVELOPING THE ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

The Cycle of Highly Effective Teaching (see figure below) is a network-wide set of expectations for how teachers do their jobs. It is a four-step model of instruction that includes planning, instruction, assessment, and planning again. The Cycle of Effective Instruction defines the broad set of responsibilities that teachers must pursue before, during, and after classroom instruction.

A key element of the Cycle is the Essentials of Effective Instruction, which guides daily instruction in AF classrooms. These Essentials articulate the specific instructional strategies AF teachers are expected to use to drive student results. The network developed the Essentials in 2008 through a yearlong process of engaging principals, academic deans, and teachers in a conversation about the most important elements of effective instruction. It was informed by research, particularly the work of Jon Saphier and Doug Lemov in parsing the practices of highly effective teachers and creating coherent frameworks of effective instruction. The broad engagement of the AF community in the process helped facilitate learning about the framework and ensured that it built organically from classroom practice. The collaboration helped to surface the best ideas and build strong commitment and ownership along the way. The results of the engagement were trimmed and refined to become AF's Essentials of Effective Instruction.

The Cycle of Effective Instruction



The goal of developing the Essentials of Effective Instruction was to create a universal set of instructional expectations that focus on pedagogy and apply to every teacher regardless of the content or the grade taught. The Essentials define three things: classroom culture and student engagement; specific tools and structures AF has decided should anchor all instruction; and the most important elements of effective pedagogy. Overall, there are 24 elements of the Essentials, which describe very specifically what should be happening in classrooms. These elements are organized into 10 categories, which are listed below (See Appendix B for a complete list of the Essentials).

ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

- 1 **Great AIMS:** *each lesson includes learning objectives that reflect high expectations and drive learning activities*
- 2 **Exit Ticket/Assessment of Student Mastery of the AIMS:** *teacher measures student mastery of the AIM(S) at the end of class with the goal of 85% of students reaching mastery*
- 3 **Most Effective and Efficient Strategies to Teach the AIMS:** *teacher demonstrates content knowledge and uses the most effective and efficient strategy to guide students to mastery; there is a sense of urgency and purpose in the classroom and the pace of instruction is brisk*
- 4 **Modeling/Guided Practice (I/We or We):** *includes mini-lesson, guided practice and checking for understanding*
- 5 **Sustained, Successful, Independent Practice (You):** *students have ample opportunities to practice*
- 6 **Classroom Culture:** *each classes demonstrates high expectations and clear routines; joy factor; the use of positive framing to correct behavior; students are given responsibilities, tools and strategies to fix problems they have created; and the teacher uses key moments in class to reinforce character skills*
- 7 **Student Engagement:** *teacher uses high engagement strategies and insists on 100% students on task*
- 8 **Academic Rigor:** *students do most of the talking and working, teacher employs planned, rigorous questioning and pushes for top-quality oral responses and student work*
- 9 **Cumulative Review:** *students get opportunities to review and practice skills already mastered as part of lesson and homework routine*
- 10 **Differentiation:** *teacher works to ensure that the needs of every student are met, particularly during independent practice*

As this list indicates, the Essentials address both *how* to structure instruction (modeled/ guided practice, independent practice, cumulative review) and *what* high-quality instruction should look like (rigor, student engagement, differentiation). This specificity suggests an AF way of teaching. While some educators are concerned that this level of explicitness has the potential to reduce teaching to a series of moves, AF teachers and leaders believe it focuses teacher practice and accelerates student learning.

To illustrate the level of specificity provided by the AF frameworks, the two tables below contrast the elements of AF's Cycle of Effective Teaching and Essentials of Effective Instruction with Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, a framework many school systems use to define effective teaching. The first table compares the broad categories of teacher expectations for which teachers are held accountable.

Comparison of Achievement First's Cycle of Effective Teaching & Danielson's Framework for Teaching Domains

AF'S CYCLE OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING	DANIELSON'S FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING DOMAINS
Goal-Setting Unit and Lesson Planning	Planning and Preparation
Classroom Culture ¹	The Classroom Environment
<i>Core Instructional Excellence</i> ²	<i>Instruction</i>
Data Analysis	Professional Responsibilities
Student and Family Relationships	
Personal Organization and Effectiveness	
Core Values and Responsibilities	

¹AF's Essentials of Effective Instruction are embedded in this element of the cycle

²Ibid

The second table drills down into the individual AF and Danielson categories that address instruction (in *italics above*) and illustrates the differences in what is included in each category as well as the level of specificity in both documents.

Comparison of Excerpts from Achievement First's Effective Instruction Essentials & Danielson's Instructional Domain

AF'S CORE EXCELLENCE/ ESSENTIALS	INSTRUCTIONAL	DANIELSON DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTION	DESCRIPTOR OF PROFICIENT
Rigor	Consistently includes a high ratio of teacher to student activity with students doing most of the "heavy lifting" of work and explaining their thinking. Plans his/her questions in advance with a range of both low- and high-level questioning and regularly stretches questions. Accepts only high quality student responses: doesn't allow students to "opt-out" because teacher cycles back to students who didn't answer. Posts examples of top-quality work for reference and celebrates great student work.	Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	Most of the teacher's questions elicit a thoughtful response, and the teacher allows sufficient time for students to answer. All students participate in the discussion, with the teachers stepping aside when appropriate.
Student Engagement	Insists and motivates so that 100% of students are on task and at least 80% of hands are in the air. Uses high-engagement strategies (e.g., rapid fire questioning, non-verbal responses) to ensure that all students are accountable for engagement; limits use of strategies that engage only one student at a time.	Engaging Students in Learning	Activities and assignment, materials and groupings of students are fully appropriate to the instructional outcomes and students' cultures and levels of understanding. All students are engaged in work of a high level of rigor. The lesson's structure is coherent, with appropriate pace. Activities, assignments, and materials are fully appropriate for diverse cultures.
Modeling and Guided Practice	Consistently delivers a well-planned and efficient mini-lesson (think aloud, explicit modeling, heavily guided practice, etc.). The mini-lesson is captured in a visual anchor so students can reference it during independent practice. Leads students through guided practice with declining scaffolding so students eventually provide both the answers and the thought process. Regularly checks for understanding during guided practice so that students transition to independent practice when ready.		
Sustained, Successful independent Practice	Designs independent practice so that students have ample, successful "at bats" to practice the AIM (at least 50% of each lesson. Moves around the classroom constantly during independent practice to assess mastery and provide individual help.		

ORGANIZING ON THE ESSENTIALS

With the Essentials defined, AF began to build a structure to bring them to life. The goal was to ensure that teachers have the support they need to embody the practices in their daily classroom instruction and to hold them accountable for implementing the Essentials. The key elements of the structure are: new teacher training and support; classroom based coaching; individual learning plans; and professional growth plans.

New Teacher Training and Support

Given AF's growth model and pace of opening new schools, the number of teachers the organization hires annually is a significant proportion of the total workforce (42 percent - 154 teachers in school year 2009-10) and this is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future. For this reason, having a strong induction program for new teachers is critical to ensuring high-quality teaching. Every teacher hired by AF participates in a two-week summer institute prior to the beginning of the school year. In the institute, new teachers are oriented to AF's approach to teaching. There is a heavy focus on the Essentials during the first week, with the second week focused on content. New teachers describe this "teacher boot camp" as "really helpful and overwhelming." In schools with a cadre of new teachers, the principal or a coach provides a year-long new teacher seminar so they can explore individual Essentials more deeply, look closely at their instructional practices, and address common challenges. The seminar often frontloads support, meeting weekly in the first half of the year to respond to teachers' needs and accelerate their learning, then shifting to bi-weekly meetings in the winter and spring.

Coaching

AF has instituted coaching throughout the network to support continuous improvement. Every employee in the organization, from the Co-CEOs to first-year teachers, has a coach whose job is to support the development of their practice. While there is some network- and school-wide professional development provided for school- and system-level initiatives (e.g., introduction to a new math curriculum), coaching is the centerpiece of AF's system of teacher support.

While coaching is universal, the coaching is differentiated to ensure that individual needs are met. Coaches visit their teachers' classroom every week or two (generally weekly for less experienced teachers; bi-weekly for more experienced teachers) to observe instruction, using the Essentials to guide their observations. They then provide feedback to the teacher on her practice and work collaboratively with her to identify specific strategies that will strengthen her instruction. Collectively, the coach and the teacher develop plans to implement in her classroom.

The Essentials serve as the coaches' primary tool. AF's coaching scope and sequence organizes the Essentials based on what the network knows about the building blocks of effective instruction. There are five phases in the scope and sequence:

- 1 Basic Management
- 2 Core Instruction
- 3 High Engagement Strategies
- 4 Rigorous Instructional Strategies
- 5 High Investment and Character Development

The scope and sequence organizes the Essentials under these five categories and provides a common coaching trajectory for teachers, which can be differentiated to meet individual teacher's specific needs and concerns. The network has organized a number of coaching resources aligned to the scope and sequence. On the network's server, coaches can view a list of the elements of the Essentials covered in a specific phase of the scope and sequence, the learning focus areas for each Essential, and specific high-impact coaching strategies. Also included are hyperlinks to articles, book chapters, and video clips from within the network and beyond, all pertaining to a specific element of the Essentials, which coaches can share with teachers and use to guide their coaching.

The resources include guiding questions coaches can use with their teachers to assess teachers' mastery of one phase (e.g., for basic management: Are 100 percent of students safe, on task, and following directions all the time?) and readiness to proceed to the next phase. As teachers become more experienced and sophisticated in their practice and move to the later phases of the scope and sequence, coaching evolves. It tends to become more fine-tuned and teacher-directed, focusing on aspects of pedagogy the teacher wants to explore more deeply on or pedagogy in a specific content area (i.e., modeling and guided practice look different in a guided reading lesson than they do in a science lab).

When schools first open and do not have a full complement of grades and classrooms, the principal is the sole or primary coach. As schools expand, coaching responsibilities are shared among the principal, academic dean(s), and some experienced, expert teachers. The ratio of teachers to coaches varies depending on the other responsibilities of a coach. (Many coaches who serve in administrative capacities also have some teaching responsibilities.) While a full-time teacher who is coaching works with just one teacher, deans and principals, who have much more limited teaching responsibilities, may work with two to eight teachers.

Coaching is supported at both the network and school level to ensure that this significant investment results in improved instruction and student outcomes. The network provides two to three days of coach training each year, focused on topics such as observation and feedback, co-planning, analyzing data, giving effective feedback, and managing challenging coaching situations. Additionally, network staff are available to provide school-based support to coaches as requested.

At the school level, one of the primary responsibilities of the principal, in addition to serving as a coach, is to coordinate a strong structure of support and accountability for coaches. At any time, principals are expected to know what coaching with individual teachers is focused on and how it is going. This is accomplished in various ways. In one school, for example, a coach develops a weekly matrix to submit to her principal that lists every teacher the coach is working with, each teacher's identified area of focus, strategies introduced, plans for implementation and classroom observation, and expectations for progress. This information is used to track the coach's work and teachers' progress. The principal sits down with the coach bi-weekly to talk through her work with teachers and to strategize how to move the work forward.

Principals serve as the "coach of coaches," providing the same support to coaches about their practice that coaches provide to teachers. Principals participate in co-observations with coaches, in which they observe a teacher together to calibrate their observations and discuss the most important feedback to give the teacher to support her growth and development and how to most effectively provide it. Principals also meet regularly with their coaches, one-on-one and/or as a group, to discuss how the coaching is going, aspects of their coach-

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ing that need further development, and supports needed to help them build their skills. This support is well grounded because many principals also directly coach one to three teachers.

The accountability for coaches is inextricably linked to coach support and is in an early stage of development. Conversations between principals and coaches tend to focus on how teachers are progressing towards their learning goals and the coaches' responsibility for progress. Coaches are not explicitly and uniformly held responsible for their teachers' performance as there is murkiness in the network about the boundaries between coaching and supervision and evaluation. Additionally, some coaches are concerned that they aren't receiving the level and kind of support they need to effectively coach the teachers assigned to them. Aligning the support and accountability of coaches is an important dimension of the performance management systems AF is working to build.

Learning Plans

Learning plans organized on the Essentials shape the work coaches and their teachers do together. In some schools, the coaching pair (coach and teacher) uses the coach's observations and the teacher's self-reflection to define what Essential (or aspect of it) they will focus on. For example, the pair might choose to focus on effective end-of-class assessments. The pair identifies specific strategies to assess student mastery and use exit tickets, how the teacher will implement them, and what the coach will focus observations on to provide feedback to the teacher. In some schools, the coaching pair works on a single area for six weeks. In other schools, the cycle is shortened into iterative, mini-cycles that can be as short as a week and very focused on a single strategy such as physical posture, voice tone, and cadence when giving students directions. What is common in both instances is a very focused and purposeful process through which specific areas of focus are identified, specific strategies are introduced and practiced, feedback is provided, and a collaborative decision is made about the teacher's level of mastery of the strategy and when it is time to move to a new area of focus.

Professional Growth Plans

While coaching and learning plans provide a constant source of support and feedback, AF uses professional growth plans (PGP) as a means of conducting an annual assessment of each teacher's practice. The PGP assesses teachers on a 1-to-4 scale relative to the Essentials and the other elements of AF's Cycle of Highly Effective Teaching. Teachers are assessed on seven elements:

- 1 Outcomes: Student Achievement and Strength of Character
- 2 Instructional Excellence (Essentials)
- 3 Classroom Culture (Essentials)
- 4 Planning and Data Analysis
- 5 Student and Family Relationships
- 6 Personal Organization and Effectiveness
- 7 Core Values and Responsibilities

At the beginning of the school year, coaches sit down with each of their teachers and walk through the PGP (See Appendix C) to clarify the expectations for teachers. At mid-year, every teacher in the network completes a self-assessment of her practice based on the Essentials and the Cycle of Highly Effective Teaching. She rates herself on each of the Essentials and elements of the Cycle. After the teacher completes her self-assessment, the coach reviews it

and completes her own assessment of the teacher. Significantly, these assessments include both data on student outcomes as well as teacher practices based on the Essentials.

The coach and teacher then meet to discuss their assessments and develop a performance summary. This identifies her strengths, the areas to work on, goals for growth, and steps to be taken to build capacity in prioritized areas. This is not defined as an evaluation but more a process of reflection, feedback, and monitoring. It is as close as AF gets to the traditional teacher evaluation process.

Professional Growth Plan: Performance Summary and Goal Setting

KEY STRENGTHS	NEXT STEPS TO BUILD THIS STRENGTH AND TO LEVERAGE THIS STRENGTH FOR THE SCHOOL.	
Professional Growth Goals Based on key areas of growth identified in your PGP, what are the specific GOALS you hope to reach by the end of the school year (up to three goals)?	WHEN and HOW will we assess progress towards your goals?	What SUPPORT do you need in order to reach your goals?

The PGP process is informed by six months of classroom observations and coaching and teachers consider the process a natural outgrowth of the coaching and learning plan process. As one put it: “It’s a nice mid-year check-in. Nothing surprising. Same things we talked about week to week. It didn’t feel like an evaluation. It felt like a bigger coaching meeting.” Another teacher acknowledged that the use of student growth data as evidence for ratings adds a sense of accountability, commenting, “The PGP did feel like an evaluation in that we had to use data to show student growth over the year. The goal is 85 percent of students will reach mastery and I’m at 74 percent.”

Coaches identify any concerns about a teacher’s performance and related areas for growth early in the fall. The goal is to resolve them by the time of the PGP. As soon as concerns are identified, the coach and teacher focus intensely on the areas for development and monitor the progress being made. At any time, a coach can put a teacher on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), which outlines specific requirements and action items that must be completed in order for the teacher to have her contract renewed. A teacher on a PIP is given four to eight weeks to improve. Teachers are given contracts for the coming school year mid-April, at which time teachers on PIPs who have not made sufficient progress are notified if they will not be renewed.

The principal’s role in the PGPs varies. If she is the teacher’s coach, the principal follows the process outlined above. If the principal is not the teacher’s coach, she is aware of the PGP because of regular informal check-ins and more formal meetings and reporting each coach does with the principal. Principals know how each coach is assessing the performance and progress their teachers are making and they provide more intensive support and monitoring for teachers on PIPs and for the coaches working with them.

THE ESSENTIALS
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IMPROVEMENT.

THE POWER OF THE ESSENTIALS

The power of the Essentials grows out of the network's commitment to them and the perception that they are a valuable means to a critical end – student achievement. The fact that the structure of accountability and instructional support is built on the Essentials ensures their centrality to teachers', schools', and the network's work. The Essentials both define effective instruction network-wide and serve as a vehicle to support meaningful individual reflection on practice and continuous improvement.

Teachers, coaches, and schools adapt the tools that support implementation of the Essentials to respond to teachers' real and immediate needs. Adaption and differentiation are expected and making things work on the ground in schools is the responsibility of teachers, coaches, and school administrators.

The Essentials also provide a mechanism for assessing instruction across schools and helping AF set priorities for network-wide improvement. In the first six weeks of the 2009-10 school year, AF school administrators and network support staff worked in pairs to observe every teacher in the network (367 teachers in 17 schools in two states). This exercise was an opportunity to set norms for observations, get a clear pulse on the quality of instruction, identify trends in instructional practices across schools, and build more coherence and consistency across the system.

These observations identified patterns that led to specific changes. For example, the teams found that "Check for Understanding," an element under "Modeling/Guided Practice," was being consistently rated lower than most other Essentials across the network. AF used this data point to tailor both feedback to schools and professional development for teachers.

While the Essentials remain the basic tool for instructional guidance in the AF network, all AF educators recognize that they are exactly that – a tool. The goal is to ensure student mastery, as measured by exit tickets, student work, a variety of diagnostic and interim assessments, and finally, the state assessment. The Essentials have been chosen because AF identified them as the behaviors of teachers who are most effective at helping students achieve at high levels. Yet, they acknowledge that there is no single way that happens. One teacher described the tension as "needing to be careful not to have a cookie cutter model of effective teaching." AF staff at every level of the organization describe the Essentials and their implementation as fluid and dynamic rather than fixed and static. They will evolve as AF learns more about what instructional strategies are most powerful and as the burgeoning research in this area begins to show some clear direction.

One AF staff person captured the dynamic nature of the Essentials best when he grinned and explained, "It's an evolving beast. Come back in two or three years and this is going to look different."

Currently, the focus is on building consistency of instruction across the network. As this develops, AF also wants to discern if certain Essentials are more "essential" than others. To this end, AF is preparing to test the correlation between teachers' performance ratings, in particular Essentials and student achievement on state assessments, to see if performance in particular Essentials produces significantly higher rates of student achievement. The results of this study could inform a prioritization of Essentials which would, in turn, lead to a refinement of the curriculum and focus of teacher coaching as well as the professional development the network offers.

AF is also examining whether the Essentials should remain content-neutral. Currently, they do not distinguish between teaching Reading, Math, or Science though there is an increasing body of research about the specifics of content-area teaching. Some of the more experienced teachers in the network suggest that they need support that is more subject-specific. This is currently being addressed on an individual basis. Whether AF will revise the Essentials to adapt them to various subject areas remains to be seen.

TEACHER CAREER PATHWAY

Through the Essentials and the PGP, AF has begun to define a picture of teacher excellence. The PGP process identifies both teachers' strengths and areas for development. It also flags struggling performers for additional support and monitoring. What the PGP wasn't designed to do was recognize teachers who meet the highest standards established by the Essentials. Efforts to date to recognize teaching excellence have focused on creating leadership opportunities – grade level team leader, coach, and dean – for teachers to pursue, some of which take them away from the classroom. AF was concerned that, in creating these leadership roles, it had inadvertently signaled to teachers that it did not place the highest value on excellent teaching.

In response, the network decided to place a higher value on great teaching by creating a Teacher Career Pathway, an evaluation and compensation system designed to define, develop, motivate, and sustain excellence in teaching. The primary goal of the Teacher Career Pathway is to increase student achievement by: setting clear standards and raising the bar for instructional excellence across the network; retaining talented teachers through recognition and reward; and reinforcing the value AF places on great teaching. Through the Teacher Career Pathway, teachers would be able to earn increased compensation, differentiated professional development, and recognition based on their performance. AF began to develop a Teaching Excellence Framework to define the criteria for movement along the career pathway (built on the Essentials, the Cycle, and the PGP). The framework would enable AF to create an evaluation system of multiple measures informed by classroom observation, student performance results, and feedback from students, parents, and peers.

Network leaders spent the 2009-10 school year working with teams of teachers to determine the goals of a career pathway and to develop both the evaluation framework and the pathway. These conversations addressed both the conceptual design of the framework and pathway and the specific elements of each. The network needed to decide what the framework would measure and how, define the different stages of the career pathway, and determine how teachers would progress from one stage to the next. One of the thorniest issues was how to measure students' character development. Student character development is half of the AF mission and many in the AF network wanted it to be an important component of a teacher's performance rating. Yet the educators recognized that character development is very difficult to measure. So to determine how to assess student character development, the network decided to conduct surveys of students and parents. The AF community was at the forefront of this conversation nationally, and made the best decisions it knew to make given the uncharted territory.

The final criteria for teaching excellence, listed below, include a mix of input and output measures and reflect the core values and mission of the organization.

THE TEACHER
CAREER PATHWAY
IS AN EVALUATION
AND COMPENSATION
SYSTEM DESIGNED
TO DEFINE, DEVELOP,
MOTIVATE, AND
SUSTAIN EXCELLENCE
IN TEACHING.

Teaching Excellence Framework

OUTCOMES		INPUTS	
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT  Data on the teacher value-added for student achievement on various tests Principal assessment of data accuracy and consistency with previous results	STUDENT CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT  Student survey on their experience in the classroom Parent survey of relationships and character development	QUALITY INSTRUCTION  Lesson observations based on the Essentials of Great Instruction Principal assessment of mastery of the Cycle of Effective Instruction	CORE VALUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS  Peer survey on core values and contributions to the mission Principal assessment of core values and contributions to the mission

With the criteria identified, AF began to identify and develop the tools it would use to assess each individual criterion. The Essentials and the Cycle of Highly Effective Teaching provide the basis for assessing instructional quality. AF enlisted Mathematica to develop a value-added model to assess instructional effectiveness. The network leveraged existing surveys from the Tripod Project and Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) to use with peers, students, and parents to assess core values and contributions and student character development. Teachers and school leaders from across the AF network provided input into the adaptation of each of the surveys.

In the spring of 2010, AF piloted all of these components in five schools with a group of 30 teachers. The network used the pilot to assess the integrity of the components of the Teaching Excellence Framework when considered individually and collectively. The pilot was instructive. They learned how important smooth execution is for teacher and leader buy-in. They learned that you can't survey kindergarteners, as they take the question, "Does your teacher push you to do you best?" quite literally and reply, "My teacher never pushes me. That would be mean." They learned that they would ultimately need to write their own surveys to ensure they could collect the data they most wanted in a manageable way. They learned that parents, peers, and students rated teachers highly, and they would have to take these ratings into account when setting cut scores.

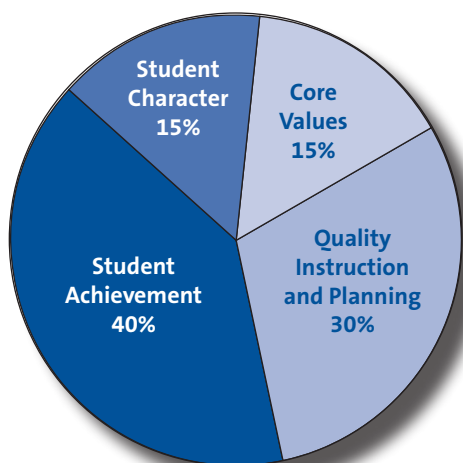
They also learned, what educators across the country are learning: value-added measures are imperfect. When AF compared principals', coaches', and regional superintendents' assessments of teachers' performance with their value-added scores, they found that the results

were mixed. While in many cases there was a strong correlation between the two results, in others the relationship was less clear: some highly rated teachers had low value-added scores and vice versa. AF decided to balance objective data with professional judgment by increasing the weight of principals' input.

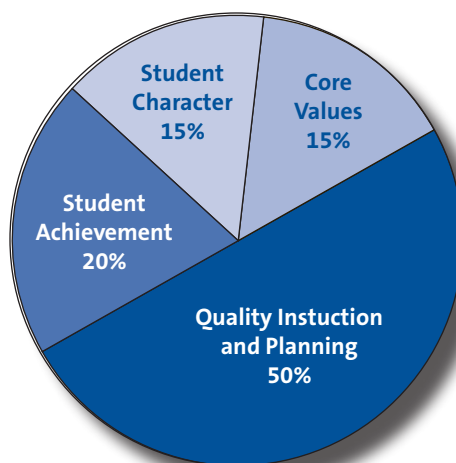
While the pilot was underway, the AF community engaged in a debate about how to weigh each of the four elements of the framework to come up with an overall rating for each teacher. This was a long and intense conversation involving people from across the network and its schools. Given that AF had been built on a set of core values that are widely owned and that guide everyone within the organization, it needed to make sure the weighting reflected these values clearly. Dacia Toll, the Co-CEO of AF, described the balance the network needed to realize and the imperative to act as, "The top priority is student achievement, but we have also learned by tracking our graduates that their success in college depends critically on their grit and other character strengths.... The thing that's both exciting and scary [about defining teaching excellence and weighting the elements] is that we're going to send signals about what we value the most.... There is no way to get this perfect but we can't let that be an obstacle."

In deciding on weights, AF outlined two approaches in response to the lack of standardized test data for many classes. The different weights for teachers who teach classes that have standardized assessments and those for whom there is no such assessment are reflected in the pie charts below (See Appendix D for greater detail).

Tested Subjects



Untested Subjects



As the AF community was developing the framework and the weighting of its elements in teacher evaluation, it was also working to define the Teacher Career Pathway, using the framework measures to recognize teaching excellence. It was clear that the framework would drive movement along the career pathway. The remaining questions to be answered included: What would be the stages of the career pathway? How (and when) would teachers move from one stage to the next? And what are the right set of rewards and incentives for teachers at each stage of the pathway?

The Stages of the Career Pathway and Progression From One Stage to the Next

AF started by defining the following five different stages of its career pathway:

Stage 1 – Intern: *Developing the skills to become a teacher; an intern is not responsible for his or her own class.* Interns can advance to Stage 2 after one successful year, at the discretion of the principal. There are only a few interns in the network as AF is piloting this role.

Stage 2 – Teacher: *Solid contributor, rapidly developing; delivers solid student achievement. The starting stage for a new teacher.* Stage 2 teachers can advance after two years of success in Stage 2. Advancement is based completely on principal discretion.

Stage 3 – Teacher: *Strong, stable contributor; delivers strong student achievement.* Stage 3 teachers can advance after two years of meeting Teaching Excellence Framework minimum required total points and minimum points for each of the Stage 4 criteria.

Stage 4 – Senior Teacher: *Strong stable contributor; delivers very strong student achievement; meet rigorous requirements.* Stage 4 teachers can advance after two years of meeting Teaching Excellence Framework minimum required total points and minimum points for each of the Stage 5 criteria.

Stage 5 – Master Teacher: *Exceptional contributor; consistently exemplary student achievement; meets rigorous requirements.* The highest performing teacher could move from stage 2 to stage 5 in seven years.

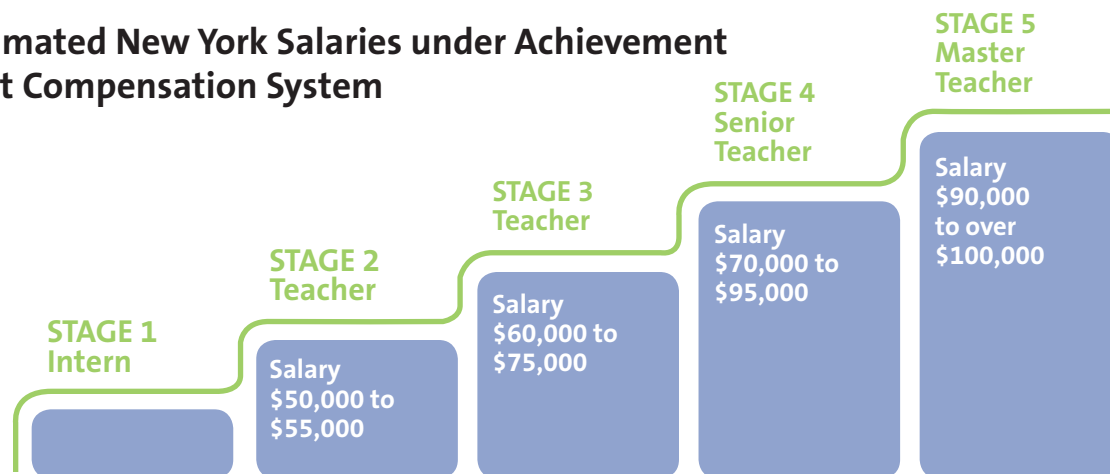
There were several considerations that informed the development of the pathway. AF wanted to make it possible for a stellar teacher to move relatively quickly (seven years) through the stages of the pathway to be recognized as a Master Teacher. To ensure greater data reliability, it also wanted to make sure that there were at least two years of data for a teacher to inform advancement. This consideration was particularly important for value-added measurements.

Rewards and Incentives Tied to the Career Pathway

Defining the stages of the Teacher Career Pathway gave AF the foundation on which to build and align the final elements of the performance management system: compensation, professional development, increased recognition, and options for sustainability. Teacher opportunities in each of these areas would be defined by their stage of performance. Compensation increases significantly as teachers move from one stage to the next. Professional growth opportunities are significant for teachers in stages 4 and 5, building on the foundation of coaching and induction support in place and responding to teachers' requests. Teachers at stages 4 and 5 receive a self-directed professional development budget, a senior and master teacher cohort, opportunities to visit excellent teachers nationally, and preferred access to special professional development series. The recognition of teaching excellence ranges from school-based appreciations at stages 1 through 3 to a special recognition luncheon for stage 5 teachers, with AF supporting two members of each recognized teacher's family to travel to participate in the celebration. Benefits related to sustainability are aimed at making teaching at AF schools attractive to high performers. At stages 4 and 5 these include hosting a teacher intern, the possibility of course-load reduction, and maintaining the same classes/grade structure over multiple years.

The visual below estimates the salary ranges at each stage of the career pathway for AF teachers working in New York. The scale will be adjusted annually to reflect cost of living increases. (See Appendix E for more details on professional development, recognition and sustainability.)

Estimated New York Salaries under Achievement First Compensation System



The salary schedule represents an opportunity for the highest performing teachers in the network to earn significantly more money. AF estimates that it will cost each school \$200,000 to \$250,000 a year to implement this new compensation scale tied to the Teaching Career Pathway. Initially, this cost will be paid for through a federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant and philanthropic support. Yet, AF is being transparent with schools, from the start, about the cost and the expectation that they will each have to realign their budgets to address this new cost. The hope is that schools will find creative ways to leverage their most effective teachers and organize instruction that will result in cost savings.

While the Teacher Career Pathway was designed to meet AF's goal of recognizing excellence in individual teachers, the network wanted to similarly celebrate school teams that work well together to great effect for students. To do this, AF created a school-wide bonus system to recognize teams in schools who are working hard to ensure excellence throughout the school. This bonus is calculated on the elements of the AF School Report Card and includes student achievement goals for each grade level as well as non-academic goals. All team members can earn a bonus equivalent up to 10 percent of their salary.

Implementation

Given all of the elements of the Teaching Excellence Framework and the Teacher Career Pathway and the complexity of implementing and integrating them, AF has established a three-year phase in of its new system. School year 2010-11 is a network-wide pilot. The parent, peer, and student surveys are being administered for all teachers and data for all of the elements are being collected and shared with every teacher. These data will be used by the network to set cut scores for progression from one stage to the next and will serve as the first of two years of data required for stage advancement. During this year, the network is piloting assessments that can measure student achievement in classes that do not have standardized testing. The learning from this network-wide pilot will inform refinements to the system to be put in place in school year 2011-12.

In school year 2011-12, AF will collect data on all elements and in the fall of 2012, it will use the data collected over the previous two years to identify teachers who are performing at the level of stages 3 and 4. These teachers will receive the salary increases and professional development opportunities outlined in the career pathway. In the fall of 2013, all of the data collected over the previous two years will be considered in identifying AF's first group of teachers whose performance distinguishes them as stage 5 – "Master Teacher."

When the Teacher Career Pathway is fully implemented, every teacher will engage in the annual evaluation cycle outlined below.

TIMING	IMPLEMENTATION OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
November-January	First round of lesson observations (<i>one external and one internal</i>)
January-February	Teacher self assessment and coach assessment of progress using the PGP
February-May	Second round of lesson observations (<i>one external and one internal</i>)
April	Contract letters provided (<i>salary increases limited to cost of living adjustment</i>)
May/June	Parent, peer and student survey data available and reviewed with teacher
May/June	Comprehensive assessment of instruction and planning conducted by coach and reviewed with teacher
September/October	Student achievement results reviewed with teacher
October (<i>beginning in 2012</i>)	Teacher placed in stage based on TEF data collected. Salary adjustments made
October	School-wide bonuses calculated

The four lesson observations (two in fall; two in spring) will be unannounced with the principal or dean conducting two of them and the regional superintendent or AF network staff conducting two. These four observations will account for 80% of teachers' total observation score. The remaining 20% will be determined by a final, end-of-year culminating evaluation of teachers' practice conducted by their principal or dean. Coaches who are also classroom teachers will not evaluate teachers.

CONCLUSION

As a network of public charter schools, AF has some opportunities and challenges that distinguish it from many traditional, urban school systems and perhaps from other systems of public schools. These include: an annual influx of new teachers, many of whom are novices; the fact that 78 percent of the entire teaching force has five or fewer years of teaching experience; a non-unionized teacher workforce; and the demands network expansion places on teachers, school administrators, and the system as a whole. Yet what it holds in common with all school systems is the need to establish a performance management system for teachers that is built on a system-wide understanding of effective instruction, that includes a mix of teacher inputs and student outcomes, and that aligns teacher support, accountability, compensation, and advancement.

Achievement First is further down this road than many school systems and there is much to be learned from its approach. Its experience offers lessons that any school system embarking on this work can apply. They include:

1 Create standards for effective instruction as the foundation of a performance management system and develop them in a way that taps the system's internal capacity, builds teacher and administrator engagement, and draws from the growing body of research in this area.

While much of the discussion around teacher effectiveness has centered on value-added measures, it is important to realize that what helps teachers improve their practice and student outcomes is organizing instruction on a set of standards of effective instruction that are proven to lead to improved student learning. While AF is a very outcome-oriented system, it has focused on defining and refining its Essentials, drawing on the work of Saphier, Lemov, Bloom, and others. The network engaged teachers, principals, regional super-intendents, and network staff in this conversation and the Essentials emerged somewhat organically from the way AF had been developing its culture of instruction since its inception in 2003.

School systems generally either develop their own standards of effective instruction or adopt well-established standards developed outside of the system. The former is time-consuming and messy and has the potential to build a strong sense of ownership among the teachers involved in the development. The latter approach is fast and neat, but creates the challenge of helping teachers own a set of standards that may feel very unfamiliar to them. Systems' approach to this issue often reflects their culture, context, and capacity. Whichever approach a system takes, spending significant time on building understanding and ownership of the standards among teachers and principals is critical to the standards becoming integral to how teachers plan, deliver, and reflect on their instruction.

2 Ensure that teacher evaluation, professional development, and support are all aligned to standards for effective instruction.

One of the striking aspects of AF's performance management system is the tight alignment of teaching expectations (standards), support, and accountability. Too often, school systems have a set of standards that exist in name only or that are used solely for evaluation. Professional development is an array of offerings that bear no relationship

to the standards or teachers' performance relative to the standards. Teachers are neither supported nor held accountable to make choices for professional development aligned to their evaluation. As a result, the opportunity to focus support to teachers and accelerate their growth is limited.

3 Communicate clearly from the start that instructional standards are one element of assessing teacher effectiveness and are a means to the end of student achievement.

The usefulness of teaching standards is defined by how well they guide teacher practice and the resulting student achievement. It is easy for teachers, principals, and systems to get caught up in the complexities of introducing standards, building educators' capacity to teach to the standards, and holding teachers accountable for teaching to the standards. These are all important elements of building a culture of high-quality instruction. Yet, if all that work doesn't yield improved student results, it is wasted effort. AF's weighting of the Essentials and student achievement results and the fact that AF teachers have concrete student growth goals they are working towards (e.g., 85 percent student mastery), makes it crystal clear that student outcomes are the ultimate goal.

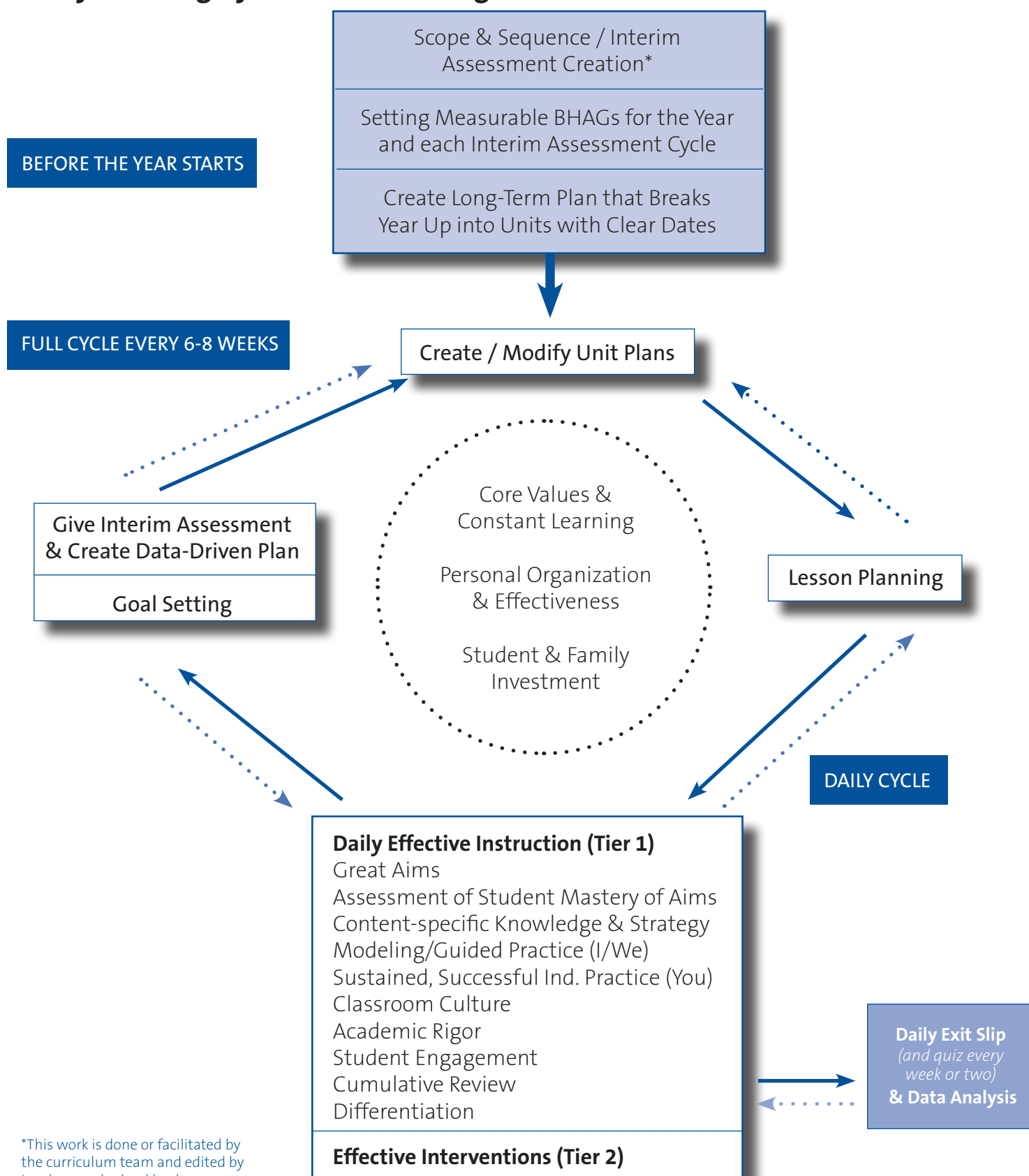
4 Anticipate and use learning from early efforts in developing a performance management system and refining the system based on the learning (think software 1.0 then 2.0).

The work of building teacher performance management systems is new, promising work and the sector is at the beginning of the learning curve. These systems will be most effective in driving student achievement if leaders commit first and foremost to learning from their efforts and continually refining their design and implementation based on the learning. Approaching this work as dynamic, evolving work will be uncomfortable for some in systems who have often operated in a culture of command, control, linear thinking, and/or compliance. Refinement requires ways for systems to learn from the work in process and to develop flexibility that allow for adaptation. AF's approach to this work from the outset focused on doing the best they knew how to do and then learning how to do it better.

Defining and implementing standards for instructional practices is essential to improving the quality of instruction and student achievement. Standards help build a common understanding of instructional excellence and can serve as the foundation on which everyone organizes their work to have the greatest impact on student learning. The power of standards is realized in how support and accountability are aligned to them and how teachers are recognized for their excellence. This requires the development of a strategic, tightly-aligned performance management system. AF provides a promising example of how one system has begun to do this work.

APPENDIX A

The Cycle of Highly Effective Teaching



APPENDIX B

The Essentials of Effective Instruction

1 GREAT AIMS

Rigorous, bite-sized, measurable, standards-based aim(s) are written on the board and reviewed with scholars; the aims clearly drive the activities, not vice-versa.

2 EXIT TICKET / ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT MASTERY OF THE AIMS

- a. Exit Ticket / Assessment: There is a systematic way at the end of class to assess every student's mastery of the aim(s) and to diagnose areas of student misunderstanding (most of the time, assessment is through an exit ticket).
- b. Student Mastery: A very high percentage (at least 85% of students) master the aim.

3 MOST EFFECTIVE & EFFICIENT STRATEGIES to teach the AIM

- a. Content Knowledge / Right Strategy: The teacher demonstrates strong knowledge of the relevant standards/ concepts and uses the most effective and efficient strategy to guide students to mastery; all information conveyed to students is factually accurate.
- b. Pacing & Urgency: The teacher moves students briskly from one part of the agenda to the next; there is a palpable sense of urgency and purpose in the room. Time is held sacred; the teacher spends the appropriate amount of time on each activity and maximizes each minute spent. The teacher sets clear guidelines for how long activities should take and uses timers, time reminders, and countdowns effectively. The class is set up to maximize efficiency, and the teacher is fully planned and prepared to maximize each moment.

4 MODELING/GUIDED PRACTICE (I/We or We)

- a. Mini-lesson: The lesson includes a clear “think aloud”, explicit modeling, heavily guided practice or other form of clear mini-lesson; examples and step-by-step processes are thought-fully planned and tightly delivered.
- b. Guided Practice / Declining Scaffolding & Guidance: The teacher then leads students through guided practice with declining scaffolding / guidance so that students eventually provide both the answers and the thought process.
- c. Visual Anchor: The mini-lesson is captured (on whiteboard, butcher paper, overhead, and/or scaffolded notes) so that students can reference it during independent practice.
- d. Check for Understanding: The teacher regularly checks for understanding during GP so that students transition to independent practice when they are ready. (A small number of students may need more guided support during independent practice, and this should not hold up the entire class.)

Note: Although I/We - You is the bedrock of the vast majority of lessons, there may be times when the teacher chooses to start with a short discovery activity, activation of prior knowledge, or some other strategy to lay a conceptual foundation (often in a You - I/We - You format; lessons should end with the We-You and include ample time for successful You time.)

5 SUSTAINED, SUCCESSFUL INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (You)

- a. Many successful “at bats”: Students have ample, successful “at bats” so that they get to practice the aim independently (at least 15-20 min of independent practice). The YOU activity should be at the same difficulty level as the WE activity so that complexity doesn't increase while support decreases. The teacher MOVES around the classroom constantly during independent practice to assess mastery and provide individual help.
- b. Read, Baby, Read: In reading classes, teachers make sure that “nose in text” time is very high and that independent work time has at least a 7:2 ratio of reading to activity/writing/discussing.

6 CLASSROOM CULTURE

- a. High Expectations, Clear Routines: The teacher sets (with clear What to Do statements) and reinforces clear expectations and routines for high standards of behavior consistent with our common picture; with a Strong Voice, the teacher sweats the small stuff (e.g. SLANT, no call outs, no laughing at other students' mistakes) and insists students Do it Again if not great.
- b. Joy Factor: The class is a fun, joyful place where kids are enthusiastic and excited about learning

- c. **Positive-Corrective Ratio:** The teacher uses Positive Framing to correct behavior and narrate class activity; there is a high ratio of positive to corrective comments; the classroom feels like a place where students want to be; students are nice and respectful to each other, and the teacher is nice and respectful to the students.
- d. **Students Own It:** Students are given the responsibility, tools, and strategies to fix problems they have or created. The teacher resists the temptation to be the sole problem-solver; students who make mistakes must own and fix them.
- e. **Teachable Character Moments:** The teacher uses key moments in class to explicitly talk about, celebrate, and reinforce character skills; these moments flow naturally from the lesson and are quick and high-impact; the teacher strategically picks examples, texts, and activities that, when appropriate, reinforce the key messages (e.g. going to college, REACH values, etc.).

7 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

- a. **100%:** The teacher insists on 100% of students on task with hands consistently in the air (students are either asking or answering questions)
- b. **Engagement Strategies:** The teacher uses high-engagement strategies (e.g. Cold Calling, rapid-fire Call-and-Response, mini white-boards, frequent choral responses, non-verbal responses, and/or “everyone writes”) to ensure that all students are accountable for engagement; makes it impossible for students to be desk potatoes and simply copy from the board; the teacher limits use of round-robin reading or questioning strategies that engage only one student at a time.

8 ACADEMIC RIGOR

- a. **Teacher Talk-to-Student Work:** There is a high ratio of student work to teacher talk with students doing most of the “heavy lifting” of doing the work and explaining their thinking.
- b. **Planned, Rigorous Questioning:** The teacher plans his/her key questions in advance with a range of questioning – both lower-level (knowledge recall and basic comprehension) and higher-level (application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation); the teacher regularly uses the Stretch It technique – WHY? What does that relate to? How would you apply this?
- c. **Top-Quality Oral Responses:** The teacher knows that Right is Right and refuses to accept low-quality student responses (insists on correct grammar, complete sentences, use of appropriate vocabulary and sufficient detail/rationale (don’t settle for so-so); the teacher is a No Opt Out champion -- no students are allowed to “opt out” because the teacher cycles back to students who didn’t answer.
- d. **Top-Quality Student Work:** The teacher sets clear expectations and has an accountability mechanism for ensuring all students complete top-quality work; examples of top-quality work are posted for reference and to celebrate great student work.

9 CUMULATIVE REVIEW

As a part of the lesson and homework routine, students get fast, fun opportunities to systematically and successfully review and practice skills that they have already mastered; standards included in cumulative review are truly review, and the teacher has a clear method of using data to inform which standards to review.

10 DIFFERENTIATION

The teacher works to ensure that the needs of every student are met. Especially during independent practice, the teacher can work with some students to provide extra support or enrichment and/or can otherwise vary the volume, rate, or complexity of work that students are asked to complete. (In classes that are grouped homogeneously by skill level, pronounced differentiation may be less necessary.)

APPENDIX C

Achievement First Professional Growth Plan Teachers 2009-2010

TEACHER

COACH

GRADE AND/OR SUBJECT

SCHOOL

DATE: SELF-EVALUATION SUBMISSION

DATE: PGP CONVERSATION

Section I. Achievement First: Student Achievement & Character Development

Purpose

In order to achieve our ambitious goals, Achievement First is committed to investing in our most important resource – our talented people. Professional Growth Plans are one step in providing consistent, aligned, on-going feedback and training throughout the network.

Directions for Teachers

- ✓ Click on the header at the top of this page and change “Teacher Name” to your name.
- ✓ For your self-appraisal, please rate your performance this school year. Include your rating and comments in the WHITE sections. Mark each rating with a capital letter “X”. Thoughtfully reflecting on your performance and completing this document will take approximately 2 hours.
- ✓ When completed, email your PGP to your coach. Your coach will add his/her appraisal directly underneath yours, in the YELLOW sections, thus creating a written dialogue.
- ✓ For each indicator, select and mark the rating that most accurately describes your performance during the 2009-2010 school year. You may select 1, 2, 3, or 4 only. You may not assign a fraction (e.g. 3.2, 1.5 etc.) for the specific performance factors.
- ✓ Cite specific evidence to support your rating. Whenever possible, tie the evidence to student achievement data. Please note that you do not need to include examples or comments for each rating. Comments are required at the end of each section and should focus on (1) areas of greatest strength and growth and (2) “foundational areas” if you are a new teacher (foundational areas are those shaded in gray).
- ✓ Do not complete the “Performance Summary and Goal Setting” section on the last page. Your school leader will complete the summary and then discuss it with you during the PGP feedback conversation. The summary can be edited based on that discussion. You and your coach will work together to complete the goal setting section during your meeting. It will be helpful to start thinking about your goals before the meeting.
- ✓ The PGP feedback conversation is an opportunity to discuss both your own self-ratings and your coach’s ratings of your performance. It is an opportunity to identify strengths, to identify areas for improvement, and to set goals for your learning and development. This meeting will occur within 2 weeks of the date you submit your PGP self-evaluation to your coach.
- ✓ After the PGP feedback conversation and any revisions to the PGP, principals will create one file for all teachers and leaders in the school and will email electronic versions of the completed PGP to: PGP@achievementfirst.org.

Ratings

- 4 – Mastery:** Teacher consistently exceeds expectations and is an exemplar for this standard. Note: It is rare for a team member to receive a rating of 4 and even the very best teachers will only have a few 4s on their entire PGP.
- 3 – Proficient:** Teacher consistently meets expectations and is solid for this standard. Note Very strong teachers will have mostly 3s on their PGP.
- 2 – In Progress:** Teacher meets this standard some or most of the time but is not yet consistently solid.
- 1 – Does not meet:** Teacher consistently does not meet expectations for this standard. This is an area for teacher growth; the teacher should work with their coach and their colleagues to improve in this area.
- N/A – Not applicable:** Teacher is not responsible for meeting this standard or the coach does not have enough data to evaluate the standard. If not applicable, the teacher and the coach will both leave the rating blank.

Teacher Name

Please add your school BHAGs and then evaluate your progress toward goals, using student data to support your ratings.

Focus Area	Indicators	Specific Student Data to Support Rating	M (4)	P (3)	IP (2)	DNM (1)
Student Achievement	BHAG 1:	•				
	BHAG 2:	•				
	BHAG 3:	•				
Student Strength of Character	Students are Respectful:	• Treat teachers like platinum • Nice; never tease, laugh at, or put down others • Patient and raise their hands • Keep their desk, classroom and school clean				
	Students show Enthusiasm:	• Follow all directions the first time • SLANT and participate actively in class • Always bring a positive attitude				
	Students exemplify Achievement:	• Absolutely do their best on all assignments • Work is always neat and complete				
	Students model Citizenship:	• Take responsibility for their actions • Tell the truth at all times • Celebrates the achievement of others and support teammates				
	Students model Hard Work:	• Come to school every day and are never late • Have all necessary materials and are wearing uniform properly at all times • Act like a college student today				
Teacher comments on areas of exceptional performance and areas of growth:						
Coach comments:						

Teacher Name _____

Section II. The Essentials of Effective Teaching: Core Instructional Excellence

Focus Area	Indicators	M (4)	P (3)	IP (2)	DNM (1)
Great Aims and Student Mastery of Aims	<i>Consistently uses rigorous, bite-sized, measurable, standards-based aims to drive instruction; writes aims on the board and reviews them with scholars.</i>				
	<i>Systematically assesses every student's mastery of the aim(s) at the end of each lesson and diagnoses areas of student misunderstanding (usually exit ticket).</i>				
Content Knowledge and Strategy	Demonstrates strong content knowledge; all information conveyed to students is factually accurate.				
	Consistently uses the most effective and efficient strategies to guide students to mastery.				
Modeling and Guided Practice	Moves students briskly from one part of the agenda to the next; there is a palpable sense of urgency and purpose in the room.				
	<i>Consistently delivers a well-planned and efficient mini-lesson (think aloud, explicit modeling, heavily guided practice, etc)</i>				
Sustained, Successful Independent Practice Rigor	The mini lesson is captured in a visual anchor so students can reference it during independent practice.				
	Leads students through guided practice with declining scaffolding so students eventually provide both the answers and the thought process.				
	Regularly checks for understanding during guided practice so that students transition to independent practice when ready.				
	<i>Designs independent practice so that students have ample, successful "at bats" to practice the AIM (at least 50% of each lesson).</i>				
	Moves around the classroom constantly during independent practice to assess mastery and provide individual help.				
	Consistently includes a high ratio of teacher to student activity with students doing most of the "heavy lifting" of work and explaining their thinking.				
	Plans his/her questions in advance with a range of both low and high level questioning and regularly stretches questions.				
	Accepts only high quality student responses; doesn't allow students to "opt-out" because teacher cycles back to students who didn't answer.				
	Posts examples of top-quality work for reference and celebrates great student work.				
	Student Engagement	Insists and motivates so that 100% of students are on task and at least 80% of hands are in the air.			
Uses high-engagement strategies (e.g. rapid fire questioning, non-verbal responses, etc) to ensure that all students are accountable for engagement; limits use of strategies that engage only one student at a time.					
Cumulative Review Differentiation	As part of the lesson and homework routine, students get fast, fun opportunities to systematically review and practice skills that they have already mastered.				
	Works to ensure that the needs of every student are met, providing extra support, enrichment, or variation of work.				
Assessment	Gives regular assessments (tests, quizzes, etc.); assigns homework every night and collects, grades and returns assignments on a regular basis. Each student receives regular, detailed and individualized feedback about their academic work.				
Teacher comments on areas of exceptional performance and areas of growth:					
Coach comments:					

Teacher Name _____

Section III. The Essentials of Effective Teaching: Classroom Culture

Focus Area	Indicators	M (4)	P (3)	IP (2)	DNM (1)
High Expectations, Clear Routines	<i>Sets and reinforces clear expectations and routines so that 100 percent of students are safe, on task and follow direction instantly.</i>				
	<i>Sweats the small stuff (SLANT, no call outs, no laughing at other's mistakes) and insists students Do it Again if not great.</i>				
Joy Factor	<i>The class is a fun, joyful place where kids are enthusiastic and excited about learning.</i>				
Positive-Correction Ratio	<i>Uses Positive Framing to correct behavior and narrate class activity; there is a high ratio of positive to corrective comments.</i>				
	<i>Students are nice and respectful to each other, and the teacher is nice and respectful to the students.</i>				
Students Own It	Students are given the responsibility, tools, and strategies to fix problems they have or created. The teacher resists the temptation to be the sole problem-solver; students who make mistakes must own and fix them.				
Teachable Character Moments	Uses key moments in class to explicitly talk about, celebrate, and reinforce character skills; these moments flow naturally from the lesson and are quick and high-impact.				
	Strategically picks examples, texts, and activities that, when appropriate, reinforce key messages (e.g. going to college, REACH values, etc.).				
Classroom Space	The classroom space purposefully reinforces the school values and culture. There are obvious posted examples of both outstanding academics and character. The space is bright and inviting; it shows museum-like attention to detail and problems are swiftly addressed.				
School Culture Leader School Culture Systems	Focuses on school-wide discipline and addresses student behaviors when they come up regardless of whether the student is "yours" or not.				
	Embraces and effectively uses school culture systems (e.g. scholar dollars, transitions, classroom removal, dismissal, etc); thoughtfully problem-solves adjustments to school culture systems with team members.				
	Uses incentives appropriately to encourage and reinforce student effort and cooperation; sees incentives as a tool, not the core management technique.				

Teacher comments on areas of exceptional performance and areas of growth:

Coach comments:

Teacher Name _____

Section IV. The Cycle of Highly Effective Teaching: Planning & Data Analysis

Focus Area	Indicators	M (4)	P (3)	IP (2)	DNM (1)
BHAGS	<i>Teacher sets measurable, ambitious, yet attainable BHAGS for the year and for each IA cycle.</i>				
	<i>Makes students aware of the BHAGs and invests students in class and individual goals.</i>				
Standards and Scope and Sequence	<i>Deeply knows the standards and the scope and sequence (for own grade/subject and the grades one year before and one year after) and knows how standards are assessed.</i>				
Year Planning	Creates a long-term plan that breaks the year into units with clear dates.				
Unit Planning	Designs rigorous, end-of-unit assessments that effectively measure mastery of standards and include both high and low level questions.				
	Designs sequences of aims that build on prerequisite skills; correctly anticipates the amount of time necessary for student to master each aim.				
Lesson Planning	<i>Has a thorough, written, daily lesson plan based on the essentials of effective instruction; uses or includes all relevant elements of appropriate lesson planning templates.</i>				
Daily and Weekly Data Analysis	<i>Effectively uses data from exit slips, quizzes, and informal assessments to plan interventions and adjust future aims.</i>				
	Has a clear and accessible system for tracking daily and weekly student data.				
IA Data Analysis	Reviews previous data-driven plan (e.g., from six weeks prior) to determine in detail how effective each part (cumulative review, re-teaching, intervention groups, new standards) of that data-driven plan had been.				
	Creates thoughtful data-driven plan each IA cycle that diagnoses why students did or did not master standards; develops specific remedies for whole-class re-teach and review, and develops targeted and differentiated student interventions.				
Teacher comments on areas of exceptional performance and areas of growth: 					
Coach comments: 					

Teacher Name _____

Section V. The Center of the Cycle: Student & Family Relationships

Focus Area	Indicators	M (4)	P (3)	IP (2)	DNM (1)
Effective Student Relationships	<i>Students understand unambiguously that the teacher cares about them and their progress.</i>				
	Develops specific, effective strategies to teach and support KWLMs; regularly checks in with KWLMs and works school-wide, class, and students-specific systems.				
	Helps all students set clear academic and character goals.				
	Systematically returns throughout the year to academic and character goals and has students reflect and problem-solve based on progress toward the goals.				
	Puts in the extra effort outside of class to build relationships (e.g. lunches with scholars, special events).				
Effective Family Relationships	<i>Works actively to build relationships with families and respects family members' role as partners.</i>				
	Parents know about BHAGs for the class and specific goals for their child.				
	Regularly communicates both success and challenges and tracks communication with families.				
Teacher comments on areas of exceptional performance and areas of growth:					
Coach comments:					

Section VI. The Center of the Cycle: Personal Organization & Effectiveness

Focus Area	Indicators	M (4)	P (3)	IP (2)	DNM (1)
Reflection Constant Learning	<i>Constantly reflects on successes and areas of growth around all areas of teaching; seeks to improve performance; is eager to get feedback and incorporates feedback in a positive, non-defensive way.</i>				
Organization and Self-Management	Has a system for capturing and checking action items and uses them to prioritize work appropriately and minimize stress.				
	Maintains accurate and clear attendance, homework and grade book records on the student information system.				
	Is on-time for meetings; completes and turns in assignments on-time.				
	<i>Has exemplary attendance and timeliness.</i>				
Communication	Effectively communicates with school leaders and fellow staff in order to positively problem-solve and advocate for the school's agenda.				
Teacher comments on areas of exceptional performance and areas of growth:					
Coach comments:					

Teacher Name _____

Section VII. The Center of the Cycle: Core Values & Responsibilities

Focus Area	Indicators	M (4)	P (3)	IP (2)	DNM (1)
Results without Excuses or Shortcuts	Works hard every day to deliver on the urgent promise to provide an outstanding education for all students; owns shortcomings and does not seek to blame external forces.				
Team and Family	Cares about others and treats everyone with respect, and work hard to preserve a sense of family. Has fun with team and celebrates differences. Collaborates and shares best practices; pitches in when teammates are struggling.				
People Matter – Mightily	Honors his or her own personal, family and community commitments and those of others. Contributes to an environment that is exceptionally professional, collegial stimulating and supportive.				
Excellence is a Habit	Strives to set the standard in all everything he/she does. Relentlessly pursues excellence and does not settle for “so-so” from students or self.				
Sweat the Small Stuff	Pays attention to even the smallest details to ensure smooth, predictable, and effective outcomes in everything he or she does.				
First Things First	Recognizes that the needs of students always come before adults and prioritizes students first.				
Whatever it Takes	Is persistent, insistent, and deliberate in his or her actions; gives 100% every day and goes the extra mile to make the difference in the lives of our students.				
Many Minds, One Mission	Sees self as a partner in a national effort to improve the communities in which we live and work; eager to learn best practices from other high-performing schools.				
Everything with Integrity	Values integrity and models it for students; does not merely post the REACH values but allows them to drive actions and words; is humble, honest, and admits mistakes.				
Teacher comments on areas of exceptional performance and areas of growth: 					
Coach comments: 					

Performance Summary and Goal Setting 2009-2010

Key Strengths	Next Steps to build this strength and to leverage this strength for the school

Based on the key areas of growth identified in your PGP, what are the specific GOALS you hope to reach by the end of the school year?	WHEN and HOW will we assess progress toward your goals?	What SUPPORT do you need in order to reach your goals?

Optional) What are your PERSONAL PRIORITIES?	HOW will you maintain your priorities?	What SUPPORT do you need?

APPENDIX D

TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

The Teaching Excellence Framework is the core tool for holistically evaluating a teacher's readiness to move up a stage. All teachers will be evaluated based on the achievement and character gains they make with their scholars and on the quality of their instruction/planning and their core values and contributions to team.

OUTPUTS		INPUTS	
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT  Data on the teacher value-added for student achievement on various tests Principal assessment of data accuracy and consistency with previous results	STUDENT CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT  Student survey on their experience in the classroom Parent survey of relationships and character development	QUALITY INSTRUCTION  Lesson observations based on the Essentials of Great Instruction Principal assessment of mastery of the Cycle of Effective Instruction	CORE VALUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS  Peer survey on core values and contributions to the mission Principal assessment of core values and contributions to the mission

Courses with Standardized Assessments

Outcomes 55%		Inputs 45%				
40 points	15 points*	30 points			15 points	
Student Academic Growth Measures Up to 40 points for principal's review and Regional Superintendent verification of value-added measurements	Student Survey Up to 7.5 points for student survey results	Parent Survey Up to 7.5 points for parent survey results	Lesson Observations Up to 25 points for overall average of 4 lesson observations (2 by coach, 2 by coach + external observer) and 1 overall Essentials assessment (by coach)	Planning Assessment Up to 5 points based on principal evaluation of planning (Teachers moving from stage 4 to 5: review of portfolio by master teacher committee)	Peer Survey Up to 10 points for peer survey results measuring the teacher's core values and contribution to team	Principal Survey Up to 5 points for principal assessment of teacher's contribution to team

Courses without Standardized Assessments

Outcomes 35%		Inputs 65%				
20 points	15 points*	50 points			15 points	
Student Academic Growth Measures Up to 20 points for principal's review and Regional Superintendent verification of student achievement data	Student Survey Up to 7.5 points for student survey results	Parent Survey Up to 7.5 points for parent survey results	Lesson Observations Up to 40 points for overall average of 4 lesson observations (2 by coach, 2 by coach + external observer) and 1 overall Essentials assessment (by coach)	Planning Assessment Up to 10 points based on principal evaluation of planning (or portfolio for Stage 5 only)	Peer Survey Up to 10 points for peer survey results	Principal Survey Up to 5 points for principal assessment of teacher's contribution to team achievement

**Student character development is half of the Achievement First mission and critical for the life-long success of our scholars. Therefore, a teacher's impact on student character is assessed not only through the student and parent survey, but also in lesson observations and planning and in core values and contributions to team. So, when taken together, a teacher's contribution to student character will account for approximately 25-30 points of a teacher's overall total (and not just the 15 points allocated explicitly to student character development).*

APPENDIX E

AF Teacher Career Pathway provides big benefits to teachers at all stages of career development – DRAFT

	Stage 1 – Intern Developing the skills to become a teacher	Stage 2 – Teacher Solid contributor, rapidly developing; deliver solid student achievement	Stage 3 – Teacher Strong, stable contributor; deliver strong student achievement	Stage 4 – Senior Teacher Strong, stable contributor; deliver very strong student achievement; meet rigorous requirements	Stage 5 – Master Teacher Exceptional contributor; consistently exemplary student achievement; meet rigorous requirements
Increased Compensation		\$40,000–45,000	\$55,000–\$65,000	\$65,000–85,000	\$80,000 - over 90,000
Robust professional development opportunities	✓ Paired with a master teacher ✓ New Staff Training and school-site PD ✓ Frequent feedback and coaching ✓ PGP and goal setting	✓ Paired with a master teacher ✓ New Staff Training and school-site PD ✓ Frequent lesson observation with feedback and coaching ✓ PGP and goal setting	✓ New Staff Training and school-site PD ✓ Frequent lesson observation with feedback and coaching ✓ PGP and goal setting	✓ Participation in senior teacher cohort ✓ \$1,500 self-directed PD budget ✓ Preferred access to special PD experiences (ex: Jon Saphier series, Marcy Cook day, culture intensive with Chi, UBD intensive) ✓ Special visits / sharing with high-performing teachers regionally ✓ Formal partnership with Team Teaching and Learning on curriculum and professional development ✓ Opportunity to serve as a coach and receive coach training ✓ Regular lesson observation with feedback and coaching ✓ PGP and goal setting	✓ Participation in master teacher cohort ✓ \$2,500 self-directed PD budget ✓ Up to 2 personal coaching sessions from network-wide or out of network “experts” ✓ Guaranteed access to special PD experiences (ex: Jon Saphier series, Marcy Cook day, culture intensive with Chi) ✓ Special visits / sharing with high-performing teachers regionally ✓ Special visits to observe high-performing teachers nationally ✓ Formal partnership with Team Teaching and Learning on curriculum and professional development ✓ Opportunity to serve as a coach and receive coach training ✓ Regular lesson observation with feedback and coaching ✓ PGP and goal setting
Increased recognition	✓ School-based appreciations	✓ School-based appreciations	✓ School-based appreciations	✓ Announcement at AF-wide PD day ✓ Listing in the Many Minds, One Mission newsletter ✓ Video of your teaching used as exemplar for PD & AF Videos	✓ Special recognition luncheon with travel of up to 2 family members to join your recognition ✓ Annual master teacher meeting with Doug & Dacia for ideas & feedback ✓ Announcement at AF-wide PD day ✓ Listing in the Many Minds, One Mission newsletter ✓ Video of your teaching used as exemplar for PD & AF Videos
More options for sustainability	✓ Reduced teaching load		✓ Keep classes/grade structure from previous year	✓ Possibility of individual PD or planning days/year ✓ Possible hosting of teacher intern ✓ Potential for course load reduction to serve as a coach ✓ Keep classes/grade structure	✓ Possibility of individual PD or planning days/year ✓ Possible hosting of teacher intern ✓ Potential for course load reduction to serve as a coach ✓ Keep classes/grade structure

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Curtis works with school systems, foundations, and education policy organizations on teacher and principal human capital issues. In 2006, as assistant superintendent of the Boston Public Schools, she developed the system's teaching standards and aligned new teacher induction support and teacher evaluation to them. Her publications include the books *Teaching Talent*, *Strategy in Action*, and *The Skillful Leader II*.

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